

Library of
Emory University



WILKIE COLLINS'S NOVELS.

*Crown 8vo., cloth extra, Illustrated, 3s. 6d. each; post
8vo., illustrated boards, 2s. each; cloth limp, 2s. 6d. each.*



- ANTONINA.** Illustrated by Sir JOHN GILBERT.
BASIL. Illustrated by Sir JOHN GILBERT and J. MAHONEY.
HIDE AND SEEK. Illustrated by Sir JOHN GILBERT and J. MAHONEY.
THE DEAD SECRET. Illustrated by Sir JOHN GILBERT.
QUEEN OF HEARTS. Illustrated by Sir JOHN GILBERT.
MY MISCELLANIES. With a Steel-plate Portrait of WILKIE COLLINS.
THE WOMAN IN WHITE. With Illustrations by Sir JOHN GILBERT and F. A. FRASER.
THE MOONSTONE. With Illustrations by G. DU MAURIER and F. A. FRASER.
MAN AND WIFE. Illustrated by W. SMALL.
POOR MISS FINCH. Illustrated by G. DU MAURIER and EDWARD HUGHES.
MISS OR MRS. ? With Illustrations by S. L. FILDES and HENRY WOODS.
THE NEW MAGDALEN. Illustrated by G. DU MAURIER and C. S. REINHARDT.
THE FROZEN DEEP. Illustrated by G. DU MAURIER and J. MAHONEY.
THE LAW AND THE LADY. Illustrated by S. L. FILDES and SYDNEY HALL.
THE TWO DESTINIES.
THE HAUNTED HOTEL. Illustrated by ARTHUR HOPKINS.
THE FALLEN LEAVES.
JEZEBEL'S DAUGHTER.
THE BLACK ROBE.
HEART AND SCIENCE: A Story of the Present Time.
"I SAY NO."

LONDON: CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY, W.

THE EVIL GENIUS

A Domestic Story

BY
WILKIE COLLINS



[IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I

London
CHATTO AND WINDUS, PICCADILLY
1886

*[The Right of Translation is Reserved. And the Sole Right of
adapting 'The Evil Genius' for Performance on the Stage has been legally
secured by the Author.]*

Affectionately Dedicated

TO

H O L M A N H U N T

CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

BEFORE THE STORY.

CHAPTER	PAGE
MISS WESTERFIELD'S EDUCATION -	1

THE STORY.

FIRST BOOK.

I. MRS. PRESTY PRESENTS HERSELF	-	111
II. THE GOVERNESS ENTERS -	-	123
III. MRS. PRESTY CHANGES HER MIND	-	133
IV. RANDAL RECEIVES HIS CORRESPONDENCE		151
V. RANDAL WRITES TO NEW YORK	-	156
VI. SYDNEY TEACHES-	-	165
VII. SYDNEY SUFFERS-	-	173
VIII. MRS. PRESTY MAKES A DISCOVERY	-	185
IX. SOMEBODY ATTENDS TO THE DOOR		197

CHAPTER	PAGE
X. KITTY MENTIONS HER BIRTHDAY	217
XI. LINLEY ASSERTS HIS AUTHORITY	233
XII. TWO OF THEM SLEEP BADLY	244
XIII. KITTY KEEPS HER BIRTHDAY	253
XIV. KITTY FEELS THE HEARTACHE	271

THE EVIL GENIUS.

BEFORE THE STORY.

MISS WESTERFIELD'S EDUCATION.

1.—*The Trial.*

THE gentlemen of the jury retired to consider their verdict.

Their foreman was a person doubly distinguished among his colleagues. He had the clearest head, and the readiest tongue. For once, the right man was in the right place.

Of the eleven jurymen, four showed their characters on the surface. They were :

The hungry juryman, who wanted his dinner.

The inattentive juryman, who drew pictures on his blotting paper.

The nervous juryman, who suffered from fidgets.

The silent juryman, who decided the verdict.

Of the seven remaining members, one was a little drowsy man who gave no trouble ; one was an irritable invalid who served under protest ; and five represented that vast majority of the population—easily governed, tranquilly happy—which has no opinion of its own.

The foreman took his place at the head of the table. His colleagues seated themselves on either side of him. Then there fell upon that assembly of men a silence, never known among an assembly of women

—the silence which proceeds from a general reluctance to be the person who speaks first.

It was the foreman's duty, under these circumstances, to treat his deliberative brethren as we treat our watches when they stop: he wound the jury up and set them going.

"Gentlemen," he began, "have you formed any decided opinion on the case—thus far?"

Some of them said "Yes," and some of them said "No." The little drowsy man said nothing. The fretful invalid cried, "Go on!" The nervous jurymen suddenly rose. His brethren all looked at him, inspired by the same fear of having got an orator among them. He was an essentially polite man; and he hastened to relieve their minds. "Pray don't be alarmed, gentlemen; I am not going to make a

speech. I suffer from fidgets. Excuse me if I occasionally change my position." The hungry juryman (who dined early) looked at his watch. "Half-past four," he said. "For Heaven's sake cut it short." He was the fattest person present; and he suggested a subject to the inattentive juryman who drew pictures on his blotting-paper. Deeply interested in the progress of the likeness, his neighbours on either side looked over his shoulders. The little drowsy man woke with a start, and begged pardon of everybody. The fretful invalid said to himself, "Damned fools, all of them!" The patient foreman, biding his time, stated the case.

"The prisoner waiting our verdict, gentlemen, is the Honourable Roderick Westerfield, younger brother of the present Lord Le Basque. He is charged with wilfully casting away the British Barque

John Jerniman, under his command ; for the purpose of fraudulently obtaining a share of the insurance money, and further of possessing himself of certain Brazilian diamonds, which formed part of the cargo. In plain words, here is a gentleman born in the higher ranks of life accused of being a thief. Before we attempt to arrive at a decision, we shall only be doing him justice if we try to form some general estimate of his character, based on the evidence—and we may fairly begin by inquiring into his relations with the noble family to which he belongs. The evidence, so far, is not altogether creditable to him. Being at the time an officer in the Royal Navy, he appears to have outraged the feelings of his family by marrying a barmaid at a public-house.”

The drowsy juryman, happening to be awake at the moment, surprised the foreman

by interposing a statement. "Talking of barmaids," he said, "I know a curate's daughter. She's in distressed circumstances, poor thing ; and she's a barmaid somewhere in the North of England. Curiously enough, the name of the town has escaped my memory. If we had a map of England——" There he was interrupted, cruelly interrupted, by one of his brethren.

"And by what right," cried the greedy juryman, speaking under the exasperating influence of hunger—"by what right does Mr. Westerfield's family dare to suppose that a barmaid may not be a perfectly virtuous woman ?"

Hearing this, the restless gentleman (in the act of changing his position) was suddenly inspired with interest in the proceedings. "Pardon me for putting myself forward," he said, with his customary

politeness. "Speaking as an abstainer from fermented liquors, I must really protest against these allusions to barmaids."

"Speaking as a consumer of fermented liquors," the invalid remarked, "I wish I had a barmaid and a bottle of champagne before me now."

Superior to interruption, the admirable foreman went on.

"Whatever you may think, gentlemen, of the prisoner's marriage, we have it in evidence that his relatives turned their backs on him from that moment—with the one merciful exception of the head of the family. Lord Le Basque exerted his influence with the Admiralty, and obtained for his brother (then out of employment) an appointment to a ship. All the witnesses agree that Mr. Westerfield thoroughly understood his profession. If he could have controlled himself, he might have risen to high rank in the Navy

His temper was his ruin. He quarrelled with one of his superior officers——”

“Under strong provocation,” said a member of the jury

“Under strong provocation,” the foreman admitted. “But provocation is not an excuse, judged by the rules of discipline. The prisoner challenged the officer on duty to fight a duel, at the first opportunity on shore ; and, receiving a contemptuous refusal, struck him on the quarter-deck. As a matter of course, Mr. Westerfield was tried by court-martial, and was dismissed the service. Lord Le Basque’s patience was not exhausted yet. The Merchant Service offered a last chance to the prisoner of retrieving his position, to some extent at least. He was fit for the sea, and fit for nothing else. At my lord’s earnest request the owners of the *John Jerniman*, trading between Liverpool and Rio, took Mr.

Westerfield on trial as first mate ; and, to his credit be it said, he justified his brother's faith in him. In a tempest off the coast of Africa, the captain was washed overboard ; and the first mate succeeded to the command. His seamanship and courage saved the vessel, under circumstances of danger which paralysed the efforts of the other officers. He was confirmed, rightly confirmed, in the command of the ship. And, so far, we shall certainly not be wrong if we view his character on the favourable side."

There the foreman paused, to collect his ideas.

Certain members of the assembly—led by the juryman who wanted his dinner, and supported by his inattentive colleague, then engaged in drawing a ship in a storm, and a captain falling overboard—proposed the acquittal of the prisoner without further consideration. But the fretful invalid cried

“Stuff!” and the five jurymen who had no opinions of their own, struck by the admirable brevity with which he expressed his sentiments, sang out in chorus, “Hear! hear! hear!” The silent jurymen, hitherto overlooked, now attracted attention. He was a bald-headed person of uncertain age, buttoned up tight in a long frock-coat, and wearing his gloves all through the proceedings. When the chorus of five cheered, he smiled mysteriously. Everybody wondered what that smile meant. The silent jurymen kept his opinion to himself. From that moment, he began to exercise a furtive influence over the jury. Even the foreman looked at him, on resuming the narrative.

“After a certain term of service, gentlemen, during which we learn nothing to his disadvantage, the prisoner’s merits appear to have received their reward. He was presented with a share in the ship which he

commanded, in addition to his regular salary as master. With these improved prospects he sailed from Liverpool on his last voyage to Brazil ; and no one, his wife included, had the faintest suspicion that he left England under circumstances of serious pecuniary embarrassment. The testimony of his creditors, and of other persons with whom he associated, distinctly proves that his leisure hours on shore had been employed in card-playing and in betting on horse races. After an unusually long run of luck, his good fortune seems to have deserted him. He suffered considerable losses, and was at last driven to borrowing at a high rate of interest, without any reasonable prospect of being able to repay the money-lenders into whose hands he had fallen. When he left Rio on the homeward voyage, there is no sort of doubt that he was returning to England, to face creditors

whom he was unable to pay. There, gentlemen, is a noticeable side to his character which we may call the gambling side, and which (as I think) was too leniently viewed by the judge."

He evidently intended to add a word or two more. But the disagreeable invalid insisted on being heard.

"In plain English," he said, "you are for finding the prisoner guilty."

"In plain English," the foreman rejoined, "I refuse to answer that question."

"Why?"

"Because it is no part of my duty to attempt to influence the verdict."

"You have been trying to influence the verdict, sir, ever since you entered this room. I appeal to all the gentlemen present."

The patience of the long-suffering foreman failed him at last. "Not another word shall pass my lips," he said, "until you find the

prisoner guilty or not guilty among yourselves—and then I'll tell you if I agree to your verdict."

He folded his arms, and looked like the image of a man who intended to keep his word.

The hungry juryman laid himself back in his chair, and groaned. The amateur artist, who had thus far found a fund of amusement in his blotting-paper, yawned discontentedly and dropped his pen. The courteous gentleman who suffered from fidgets requested leave to walk up and down the room ; and at the first turn he took woke the drowsy little man, and maddened the irritable invalid by the creaking of his boots. The chorus of five, farther than ever from arriving at an opinion of their own, looked at the silent juryman. Once more he smiled mysteriously ; and once more he offered no explanation of what was passing in his mind

—except that he turned his bald head slowly in the direction of the foreman. Was he in sympathy with a man who had promised to be as silent as himself?

In the meantime, nothing was said or done. Helpless silence prevailed in every part of the room.

“Why the devil doesn’t somebody begin?” cried the invalid. “Have you all forgotten the evidence?”

This startling question roused the jury to a sense of what was due to their oaths, if not to themselves. Some of them recollected the evidence in one way, and some of them recollected it in another; and each man insisted on doing justice to his own excellent memory, and on stating his own unanswerable view of the case.

The first man who spoke began at the middle of the story told by the witnesses in court. “I am for acquitting the captain,

gentlemen ; he ordered out the boats, and saved the lives of the crew.”—“ And I am for finding him guilty, because the ship struck on a rock in broad daylight, and in moderate weather.”—“ I agree with you, sir. The evidence shows that the vessel was steered dangerously near to the land, by direction of the captain, who gave the course.”—“ Come, come, gentlemen ! let us do the captain justice. The defence declares that he gave the customary course, and that it was not followed when he left the deck. As for his leaving the ship in moderate weather, the evidence proves that he believed he saw signs of a storm brewing.”—“ Yes, yes, all very well ; but what were the facts ? When the loss of the ship was reported, the Brazilian authorities sent men to the wreck, on the chance of saving the cargo ; and, days afterwards, there the ship was found, just as the captain and the crew had left her.”—

“Don’t forget, sir, that the diamonds were missing, when the salvors examined the wreck.”—“All right, but that’s no proof that the captain stole the diamonds; and, before they had saved half the cargo, a storm did come on and break the vessel up: so the poor man was only wrong in the matter of time, after all.”—“Allow me to remind you, gentlemen, that the prisoner was deeply in debt, and therefore had an interest in stealing the diamonds.”—“Wait a little, sir. Fair play’s a jewel. Who was in charge of the deck when the ship struck? The second mate. And what did the second mate do, when he heard that his owners had decided to prosecute? He committed suicide! Is there no proof of guilt in that act?”—“You are going a little too fast, sir. The coroner’s jury declared that the second mate killed himself in a state of temporary insanity.”—“Gently! gently! we have nothing

to do with what the coroner's jury said. What did the judge say when he summed up?"—"Bother the judge! He said what they all say: 'Find the prisoner guilty, if you think he did it; and find him not guilty, if you think he didn't.' And then he went away to his comfortable cup of tea in his private room. And here are we perishing of hunger, and our families dining without us."—"Speak for yourself, sir; *I* haven't got a family."—"Consider yourself lucky, sir; *I* have got twelve, and my life is a burden to me, owing to the difficulty of making both ends meet."—"Gentlemen! gentlemen! we are wandering again. Is the captain guilty or not? Mr. Foreman, we none of us intended to offend you. Will you tell us what *you* think?"

No; the foreman kept his word. "Decide for yourselves first," was his only reply.

In this emergency, the member afflicted

with fidgets suddenly assumed a position of importance. He started a new idea.

“Suppose we try a show of hands,” he suggested. “Gentlemen who find the prisoner guilty will please hold up their hands.”

Three votes were at once registered in this way, including the vote of the foreman. After a moment of doubt, the chorus of five decided on following the opinion which happened to be the first opinion expressed in point of time. Thereupon, the show of hands for the condemnation of the prisoner rose to eight. Would this result have an effect on the undecided minority of four? In any case, they were invited to declare themselves next. Only three hands were held up. One incomprehensible man abstained from expressing his sentiments even by a sign. Is it necessary to say who that man was? A mysterious change had now presented itself in his appearance, which made

him an object of greater interest than ever. His inexplicable smile had vanished. He sat immovable, with closed eyes. Was he meditating profoundly? or was he only asleep? The quick-witted foreman had long since suspected him of being simply the stupidest person present—with just cunning enough to conceal his own dulness by holding his tongue. The jury arrived at no such sensible conclusion. Impressed by the intense solemnity of his countenance, they believed him to be absorbed in reflections of the utmost importance to the verdict. After a heated conference among themselves, they decided on inviting the one independent member present—the member who had taken no part in their proceedings—to declare his opinion in the plainest possible form. “Which way does your view of the verdict incline, sir? Guilty or not guilty?”

The eyes of the silent juryman opened with the slow and solemn dilation of the eyes of an owl. Placed between the alternatives of declaring himself in one word or in two, his taciturn wisdom chose the shortest form of speech. "Guilty," he answered—and shut his eyes again, as if he had had enough of it already

An unutterable sense of relief pervaded the meeting. Enmities were forgotten, and friendly looks were exchanged. With one accord, the jury rose to return to court. The prisoner's fate was sealed. The verdict was "Guilty "

2.—*The Sentence.*

The low hum of talk among the persons in court ceased when the jury returned to their places. Curiosity now found its centre of attraction in the prisoner's wife—who had been present throughout the trial. The

question of the moment was : How will she bear the interval of delay which precedes the giving of the verdict ?

In the popular phrase, Mrs. Westerfield was a showy woman. Her commanding figure was finely robed in dark colours ; her profuse light hair hung over her forehead in little clusters of ringlets ; her features, firmly but not delicately shaped, were on a large scale. No outward betrayal of the wife's emotion rewarded the public curiosity : her bold light-grey eyes sustained the general gaze without flinching. To the surprise of the women present, she had brought her two young children with her to the trial. The eldest was a pretty little girl of ten years old ; the second child (a boy) sat on his mother's knee. It was generally observed that Mrs. Westerfield took no notice of her eldest child. When she whispered a word from time to time, it was always

addressed to her son. She fondled him when he grew restless ; but she never looked round to see if the girl at her side was as weary of the proceedings as the boy

The judge took his seat, and the order was given to bring the prisoner up for judgment.

There was a long pause. The audience—remembering his ghastly face when he first appeared before them—whispered to each other, “ He’s taken ill ;” and the audience proved to be right.

The surgeon of the prison entered the witness-box, and, being duly sworn, made his medical statement.

The prisoner’s heart had been diseased for some time past, and the malady had been neglected. He had fainted under the prolonged suspense of waiting for the verdict. The swoon had proved to be of such a serious nature that the witness

refused to answer for consequences if a second fainting-fit was produced by the excitement of facing the court and the jury.

Under these circumstances, the verdict was formally recorded, and sentence was deferred. Once more, the spectators looked at the prisoner's wife.

She had risen to leave the court. In the event of an adverse verdict, her husband had asked for a farewell interview ; and the governor of the prison, after consultation with the surgeon, had granted the request. It was observed, when she retired, that she held her boy by the hand, and left the girl to follow. A compassionate lady near her offered to take care of the children while she was absent. Mrs. Westerfield answered quietly and coldly : "Thank you—their father wishes to see them."

The prisoner was dying ; nobody could look at him and doubt it.

His eyes opened wearily, when his wife and children approached the bed on which he lay helpless—the wreck of a grandly-made man. He struggled for breath, but he could still speak a word or two at a time. “I don’t ask you what the verdict is,” he said to his wife ; “I see it in your face.”

Tearless and silent, she waited by her husband’s side. He had only noticed her for a moment. All his interest seemed to be centred in his children. The girl stood nearest to him : he looked at her with a faint smile.

The poor child understood him. Crying piteously, she put her arms round his neck and kissed him. “Dear papa,” she said ; “come home and let me nurse you.”

The surgeon, watching the father’s face, saw a change in him which the other persons present had not observed. The failing heart felt that parting moment, and

sank under it. "Take the child away," the surgeon whispered to the mother. Brandy was near him; he administered it while he spoke, and touched the fluttering pulse. It felt, just felt, the stimulant. He revived for a moment, and looked wistfully for his son. "The boy," he murmured; "I want my boy." As his wife brought the child to him, the surgeon whispered to her again. "If you have anything to say to him, be quick about it!" She shuddered; she took his cold hand. Her touch seemed to nerve him with new strength; he asked her to stoop over him. "They won't let me write here," he whispered, "unless they see my letter." He paused to get his breath again. "Lift up my left arm," he gasped. "Open the wristband."

She detached the stud which closed the wristband of the shirt. On the inner side of the linen there was a line written in red

letters—red of the colour of blood. She saw these words: “*Look in the lining of my trunk.*”

“What for?” she asked.

The fading light in his eyes flashed on her a dreadful look of doubt. His lips fell apart in the vain effort to answer. His last sigh fluttered the light ringlets of her hair as she bent over him.

The surgeon pointed to her children. “Take the poor things home,” he said; “they have seen the last of their father.”

Mrs. Westerfield obeyed in silence. She had her own reasons for being in a hurry to get home. Leaving the children under the servant’s care, she locked herself up in the dead man’s room, and emptied his trunk of the few clothes that had been left in it.

The lining which she was now to examine was of the customary material, and

of the usual striped pattern in blue and white. Her fingers were not sufficiently sensitive to feel anything under the surface, when she tried it with her hand. Turning the empty trunk with the inner side of the lid towards the light, she discovered, on one of the blue stripes of the lining, a thin little shining stain which looked like a stain of dried gum. After a moment's consideration, she cut the gummed line with a penknife. Something of a white colour appeared through the aperture. She drew out a folded sheet of paper.

It proved to be a letter in her husband's handwriting. An enclosure dropped to the floor when she opened it, in the shape of a small slip of paper. She picked it up. The morsel of paper presented letters, figures, and crosses arranged in lines, and mingled together in what looked like hopeless confusion.

3.—*The Letter.*

Mrs. Westerfield laid the incomprehensible slip of paper aside, and, in search of an explanation, returned to the letter. Here again she found herself in a state of perplexity. Directed to "Mrs. Roderick Westerfield," the letter began abruptly, without the customary form of address. Did it mean that her husband was angry with her when he wrote? It meant that he doubted her.

In these terms he expressed himself :

"I write to you before my trial takes place. If the verdict goes in my favour, I shall destroy what I have written. If I am found guilty, I must leave it to you to do what I should otherwise have done for myself.

"The undeserved misfortune that has overtaken me began with the arrival of my

ship in the port of Rio. Our second mate (his duty for the day being done) asked leave to go on shore—and never returned. What motive determined him on deserting, I am not able to say. It was my own wish to supply his place by promoting the best seaman on board. My owners' agents overruled me, and appointed a man of their own choosing.

“What nation he belonged to I don't know. The name he gave was Beljames, and he was reported to be a broken-down gentleman. Whoever he might be, his manner and his talk were captivating. Everybody liked him.

“After the two calamities of the loss of the ship and the disappearance of the diamonds—these last being valued at five thousand pounds—I returned to England by the first opportunity that offered, having Beljames for a companion.

“Shortly after getting back to my house in London, I was privately warned by a good friend that my owners had decided to prosecute me for wilfully casting away the ship, and (crueller still) for having stolen the missing diamonds. The second mate, who had been in command of the vessel when she struck on the rock, was similarly charged along with me. Knowing myself to be innocent, I determined, of course, to stand my trial. My wonder was, what Beljames would do. Would he follow my example? or, if he got the chance, would he try to make his escape?

“I might have thought it only friendly to give this person a word of warning, if I had known where to find him. We had separated when the ship reached the port of Falmouth, in Cornwall, and had not met since. I gave him my address in London ; but he gave me no address in return.

“ On the voyage home, Beljames told me that a legacy had been left to him ; being a small freehold house and garden in St. John’s Wood, London. His agent, writing to him on the subject, had reported the place to be sadly out of repair, and had advised him to find somebody who would take it off his hands on reasonable terms. This seemed to point to a likelihood of his being still in London, trying to sell his house.

“ While my mind was running on these recollections, I was told that a decent elderly woman wanted to see me. She proved to be the landlady of the house in which Beljames lodged ; and she brought an alarming message. The man was dying, and desired to see me. I went to him immediately.

“ Few words are best, when one has to write about one’s own troubles.

“Beljames had heard of the intended prosecution. How he had been made aware of it, death left him no time to tell me. The miserable wretch had poisoned himself—whether in terror of standing his trial, or in remorse of conscience, it is not any business of mine to decide. Most unluckily for me, he first ordered the doctor and the landlady out of the room ; and then, when we two were alone, owned that he had purposely altered the course of the ship, and had stolen the diamonds.

“To do him justice, he was eager to save me from suffering for his fault.

“Having eased his mind by confession, he gave me the slip of paper (written in cypher) which you will find enclosed in this. ‘There is my note of the place where the diamonds are hidden,’ he said. Among the many ignorant people who know nothing of cyphers, I am one—and I told him so.

‘That’s how I keep my secret,’ he said; ‘write from my dictation, and you shall know what it means. Lift me up first.’ As I did it, he rolled his head to and fro, evidently in pain. But he managed to point to pen, ink, and paper, on a table hard by, on which his doctor had been writing. I left him for a moment, to pull the table nearer to the bed—and in that moment he groaned, and cried out for help. I ran to the room downstairs where the doctor was waiting. When we got back to him he was in convulsions. It was all over with Beljames.

“The lawyers who are to defend me have tried to get Experts, as they call them, to interpret the cypher. The Experts have all failed. They will declare, if they are called as witnesses, that the signs on the paper are not according to any known rules,

and are marks made at random, meaning nothing.

“As for any statement, on my part, of the confession made to me, the law refuses to hear it, except from the mouth of a witness. I might prove that the ship’s course was changed, contrary to my directions, after I had gone below to rest, if I could find the man who was steering at the time. God only knows where that man is.

“On the other hand, the errors of my past life, and my being in debt, are circumstances dead against me. The lawyers seem to trust almost entirely in a famous counsel, whom they have engaged to defend me. For my own part I go to my trial with little or no hope.

“If the verdict is guilty, and if you have any regard left for my character, never rest until you have found somebody who can interpret these cursed signs. Do for me, I

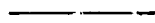
say, what I cannot do for myself. Recover the diamonds; 'and, when you restore them, show my owners this letter.

“ Kiss the children for me. I wish them, when they are old enough, to read this defence of myself, and to know that their father, who loved them dearly, was an innocent man. My good brother will take care of you, for my sake. I have done.

“ RODERICK WESTERFIELD.”

Mrs. Westerfield took up the cypher once more. She looked at it as if it was a living thing that defied her.

“ If I am ever able to read this gibberish,” she decided, “ I know what I'll do with the diamonds!”



4.—*The Garret.*

One year exactly after the fatal day of the Trial, Mrs. Westerfield (secluded in

the sanctuary of her bedroom) celebrated her release from the obligation of wearing widows' weeds.

The conventional gradations in the outward expression of grief, which lead from black clothing to grey, formed no part of this afflicted lady's system of mourning. She laid her best blue walking dress and her new bonnet to match on the bed, and admired them to her heart's content. Her discarded garments were left on the floor. "Thank Heaven, I've done with You!" she said—and kicked her rusty mourning out of the way as she advanced to the fireplace to ring the bell.

"Where is my little boy?" she asked, when the landlady entered the room.

"He's down with me in the kitchen, ma'am; I'm teaching him to make a plum cake for himself. He's so happy! I hope you don't want him just now?"

“Not the least in the world. I want you to take care of him while I am away. By-the-bye, where’s Syd?”

The eldest child (the girl) had been christened Sydney, in compliment to one of her father’s female relatives. The name was not liked by her mother—who had shortened it to Syd, by way of leaving as little of it as possible. With a look at Mrs. Westerfield which expressed ill-concealed aversion, the landlady answered: “She’s up in the lumber-room, poor child. She says you sent her there to be out of the way.”

“Ah, to be sure, so I did.”

“There’s no fireplace in the garret, ma’am. I’m afraid the little girl must be cold and lonely.”

It was useless to plead for Syd—Mrs. Westerfield was not listening. Her attention was absorbed by her own plump and pretty hands. She took a tiny file from

the dressing-table, and put a few finishing-touches to her nails. "Send me some hot water," she said ; "I want to dress."

The servant girl who carried the hot water upstairs was new to the ways of the house. After having waited on Mrs. Westerfield, she had been instructed by the kind-hearted landlady to go on to the top floor. "You will find a pretty little girl in the garret, all by herself. Say you are to bring her down to my room, as soon as her Mamma has gone out."

Mrs. Westerfield's habitual neglect of her eldest child was known to every person in the house. Even the new servant had heard of it. Interested by what she saw, on opening the garret door, she stopped on the threshold and looked in.

The lumber in the room consisted of two rotten old trunks, a broken chair, and a dirty volume of sermons of the old-fashioned

quarto size. The grimy ceiling slanting downwards to a cracked window, was stained with rain that had found its way through the roof. The faded wall-paper, loosened by damp, was torn away in some places, and bulged loose in others. There were holes in the skirting-board ; and from one of them peeped the brightly timid eyes of the child's only living companion in the garret—a mouse, feeding on crumbs which she had saved from her breakfast.

Syd looked up when the mouse darted back into its hole, on the opening of the door. “Lizzie ! Lizzie !” she said gravely, “you ought to have come in without making a noise. You have frightened away my youngest child.”

The good-natured servant burst out laughing. “Have you got a large family, Miss?” she inquired, humouring the joke.

Syd failed to see the joke. “Only two

more," she answered as gravely as ever—and lifted up from the floor two miserable dolls, reduced to the last extremity of dirt and dilapidation. "My two eldest," this strange child resumed, setting up the dolls against one of the empty trunks. "The eldest is a girl, and her name is Syd. The other is a boy, untidy in his clothes, as you see. Their kind Mamma forgives them when they are naughty, and buys ponies for them to ride on, and always has something nice for them to eat when they are hungry. Have you got a kind Mamma, Lizzie? And are you very fond of her?"

Those innocent allusions to the neglect which was the one sad experience of Syd's young life, touched the servant's heart. A bygone time was present to her memory, when she too had been left without a play-fellow to keep her company or a fire to warm her, and had not endured it patiently.

“Oh, my dear,” she said, “your poor little arms are red with cold. Come to me and let me rub them.”

But Syd's bright imagination was a better protection against the cold than all the rubbing that the hands of a merciful woman could offer. “You are very kind, Lizzie,” she answered. “I don't feel the cold when I am playing with my children. I am very careful to give them plenty of exercise; we are going to walk in the Park.”

She gave a hand to each of the dolls, and walked slowly round and round the miserable room, pointing out visionary persons of distinction and objects of interest. “Here's the Queen, my dears, in her gilt coach, drawn by six horses. Do you see her sceptre poking out of the carriage window? She governs the nation with that. Bow to the Queen. And now look at the beautiful bright water. There's the island where the

ducks live. Ducks are happy creatures. They have their own way in everything, and they're good to eat when they're dead. At least they used to be good, when we had nice dinners in Papa's time. I try to amuse the poor little things, Lizzie. Their Papa is dead. I'm obliged to be Papa and Mamma to them, both in one. Do you feel the cold, my dears?" She shivered as she questioned her imaginary children. "Now we are at home again," she said, and led the dolls to the empty fireplace. "Roaring fires always in *my* house," cried the resolute little creature, rubbing her cold hands cheerfully before the bleak blank grate.

Warm-hearted Lizzie could control herself no longer.

"If the child would only make some complaint," she burst out, "it wouldn't be so dreadful! Oh, what a shame! what a shame!" she cried, to the astonishment of

little Syd. "Come down, my dear, to the nice warm room where your brother is. Oh, your mother? I don't care if your mother sees us; I should like to give your mother a piece of my mind. There! I don't mean to frighten you; I'm one of your bad children—I fly into a passion. You carry the dolls, and I'll carry *you*. Oh, how she shivers! Give us a kiss."

Sympathy which expressed itself in this way was new to Syd. Her eyes opened wide in childish wonder—and suddenly closed again in childish terror, when her good friend the servant passed Mrs. Westerfield's door on the way downstairs. "If Mamma bounces out on us," she whispered, "pretend we don't see her." The nice warm room received them in safety. Under no stress of circumstances had Mrs. Westerfield ever been known to dress herself in a hurry. A good half-hour more had

passed before the house door was heard to bang—and the pleasant landlady, peeping through the window, said : “ There she goes. Now, we’ll enjoy ourselves !”

5.—*The Landlord.*

Mrs. Westerfield’s destination was the public-house in which she had been once employed as a barmaid. Entering the place without hesitation, she sent in her card to the landlord. He opened the parlour door himself, and invited her to walk in.

“ You wear well,” he said, admiring her. “ Have you come here to be my barmaid again ?”

“ Do you think I am reduced to that ?” she answered.

“ Well, my dear, more unlikely things have happened. They tell me you depend

for your income on Lord Le Basque—and his lordship's death was in the newspapers last week."

"And his lordship's lawyers continue my allowance."

Having smartly set the landlord right in those words, she had not thought it necessary to add that Lady Le Basque, continuing the allowance at her husband's request, had also notified that it would cease if Mrs. Westerfield married again.

"You're a lucky woman," the landlord remarked. "Well, I'm glad to see you. What will you take to drink?"

"Nothing, thank you. I want to know if you have heard anything lately of James Bellbridge."

The landlord was a popular person in his own circle—not accustomed to restrain himself when he saw his way to a joke. "Here's constancy!" he said. "She's

sweet on James, after having jilted him twelve years ago!"

Mrs. Westerfield rose with dignity. "I am accustomed to be treated respectfully," she replied. "I wish you good-morning."

The easy landlord pressed her back into her chair. "Don't be a fool," he said; "James is in London—James is staying in my house. What do you think of that?"

Mrs. Westerfield's bold grey eyes expressed eager curiosity and interest. "You don't mean that he is going to be barman here again?"

"No such luck, my dear; he is a gentleman at large, who patronises my house."

Mrs. Westerfield went on with her questions.

"Has he left America for good?"

"Not he! James Bellbridge is going back to New York, to open a saloon (as they call it) in partnership with another

man. He's in England, he says, on business. It's my belief that he wants money for this new venture on bad security. They're smart people in New York. His only chance of getting his bills discounted is to humbug his relations, down in the country."

"When does he go to the country?"

"He's there now."

"When does he come back?"

"You're determined to see him, it appears! He comes back to-morrow."

"Is he married?"

"Aha! now we're coming to the point. Make your mind easy. Plenty of women have set the trap for him ; but he has not walked into it yet. Shall I give him your love?"

"Yes," she said coolly. "As much love as you please."

"Meaning marriage?" the landlord inquired.

“And money,” Mrs. Westerfield added.

“Lord Le Basque’s money?”

“Lord Le Basque’s money may go to the Devil!”

“Hullo! Your language reminds of the time when you were barmaid. You don’t mean to say you have had a fortune left you?”

“I do! Will you give a message to James?”

“I’ll do anything for a lady with a fortune.”

“Tell him to come and drink tea with his old sweetheart to-morrow, at six o’clock.”

“He won’t do it.”

“He will.”

With that difference of opinion, they parted.

6.—*The Brute.*

To-morrow came—and Mrs. Westerfield's faithful James justified her confidence in him.

“Oh, Jemmy, how glad I am to see you! You dear, dear fellow, I'm yours at last.”

“That depends, my lady, on whether I want you. Let go of my neck.”

The man who entered this protest against imprisonment in the arms of a fine woman, was one of the human beings who are grown to perfection on English soil. He had the fat face, the pink complexion, the hard blue eyes, the scanty yellow hair, the smile with no meaning in it, the tremendous neck and shoulders, the mighty fists and feet, which are seen in complete combination in England only. Men of this breed possess a nervous system without being aware of it; suffer affliction without feeling it; exercise courage

without a sense of danger; marry without love; eat and drink without limit; and sink (big as they are), when disease attacks them, without an effort to live.

Mrs. Westerfield released her guest's bull-neck at the word of command. It was impossible not to submit to him—he was so brutal. Impossible not to admire him—he was so big.

“Have you no love left for me?” was all she ventured to say.

He took the reproof good-humouredly. “Love?” he repeated. “Come! I like that—after throwing me over for a man with a handle to his name. Which am I to call you: ‘Mrs.’? or ‘My Lady’?”

“Call me your own. What is there to laugh at, Jemmy? You used to be fond of me; you would never have gone to America, when I married Westerfield, if I hadn't been dear to you. Oh, if I'm sure of anything,

I'm sure of that! You wouldn't bear malice, dear, if you only knew how cruelly I have been disappointed."

He suddenly showed an interest in what she was saying: the brute became cheery and confidential. "So he made you a bad husband, did he? Up with his fist and knocked you down, I dare say, if the truth was known?"

"You're all in the wrong, dear. He would have been a good husband, if I had cared about him. I never cared about anybody but you. It wasn't Westerfield who tempted me to say Yes."

"That's a lie."

"No, indeed it isn't."

"Then why did you marry him?"

"When I married him, Jemmy, there was a prospect—oh, how could I resist it? Think of being one of the Le Basques! Held in honour ~~to the~~ end of my life, by that

noble family, whether my husband lived or died!"

To the barman's ears, this sounded like sheer nonsense. His experience in the public-house suggested an explanation. "I say, my girl, have you been drinking?"

Mrs. Westerfield's first impulse led her to rise and point indignantly to the door. He had only to look at her—and she sat down again a tamed woman. "You don't understand how the chance tempted me," she answered gently.

"What chance do you mean?"

"The chance, dear, of being a lord's mother."

He was still puzzled, but he lowered his tone. The true-born Briton bowed by instinct before the woman who had jilted him, when she presented herself in the character of a lord's mother. "How do you make that out, Maria?" he asked politely

She drew her chair nearer to him, when he called her by her Christian name for the first time.

“When Westerfield was courting me,” she said, “his brother (my lord) was a bachelor. A lady—if one can call such a creature a lady!—was living under his protection. He told Westerfield he was very fond of her, and he hated the idea of getting married. ‘If your wife’s first child turns out to be a son,’ he said, ‘there is an heir to the title and estates, and I may go on as I am now.’ We were married a month afterwards—and when my first child was born it was a girl. I leave you to judge what the disappointment was! My lord (persuaded, as I suspect, by the woman I mentioned just now) ran the risk of waiting another year, and a year afterwards, rather than be married. Through all that time, I had no other child or prospect of a child.

His lordship was fairly driven into taking a wife. Ah, how I hate her! *Their* first child was a boy—a big, bouncing, healthy brute of a boy! And six months afterwards, my poor little fellow was born. Only think of it! And tell me, Jemmy, don't I deserve to be a happy woman, after suffering such a dreadful disappointment as that? Is it true that you're going back to America?"

"Quite true."

"Take me back with you."

"With a couple of children?"

"No. Only with one. I can dispose of the other in England. Wait a little before you say No. Do you want money?"

"You couldn't help me, if I did."

"Marry me, and I can help you to a fortune."

He eyed her attentively, and saw that she was in earnest. "What do you call a fortune?" he asked.

"Five thousand pounds," she answered.

His eyes opened; his mouth opened; he scratched his head. Even his impenetrable nature proved to be capable of receiving a shock. Five thousand pounds! He asked faintly for "a drop of brandy."

She had a bottle of brandy ready for him.

"You look quite overcome," she said.

He was too deeply interested in the restorative influence of the brandy to take any notice of this remark. When he had recovered himself he was not disposed to believe in the five thousand pounds.

"Where's the proof of it?" he said sternly.

She produced her husband's letter. "Did you read the Trial of Westerfield for casting away his ship?" she asked.

"I heard of it."

"Will you look at this letter?"

"Is it long?"

"Yes."

“Then suppose you read it to me.”

He listened with the closest attention while she read. The question of stealing the diamonds (if they could only be found) did not trouble either of them. It was a settled question, by tacit consent, on both sides. But the value in money of the precious stones suggested a doubt that still weighed on his mind.

“How do you know they’re worth five thousand pounds?” he inquired.

“You dear old stupid! Doesn’t Westerfield himself say so in his letter?”

“Read that bit again.”

She read it again: “After the two calamities of the loss of the ship, and the disappearance of the diamonds—these last being valued at five thousand pounds—I returned to England.”

Satisfied so far, he wanted to look at the cypher next. She handed it to him with a

stipulation: "Yours, Jemmy, on the day when you marry me."

He put the slip of paper into his pocket. "Now I've got it," he said, "suppose I keep it?"

A woman who has been barmaid at a public-house is a woman not easily found at the end of her resources. "In that case," she curtly remarked, "I should first call in the police, and then telegraph to my husband's employers in Liverpool."

He handed the cypher back. "I was joking," he said.

"So was I," she answered.

They looked at each other. They were made for each other—and they both felt it. At the same time, James kept his own interests steadily in view. He stated the obvious objection to the cypher. Experts had already tried to interpret the signs, and had failed.

“Quite true,” she added, “but other people may succeed.”

“How are you to find them?”

“Leave me to try. Will you give me a fortnight from to-day ”

“All right. Anything else?”

“One thing more. Get the marriage license at once.”

“Why?”

“To show that you are in earnest.”

He burst out laughing. “It mightn’t be much amiss,” he said, “if I took you back with me to America; you’re the sort of woman we want in our new saloon. I’ll get the license. Good-night.”

As he rose to go, there was a soft knock at the door. A little girl, in a shabby frock, ventured to show herself in the room.

“What do you want here?” her mother asked sharply.

Syd held out a small thin hand, with a

letter in it, which represented her only excuse. Mrs. Westerfield read the letter, and crumpled it up in her pocket. "One of your secrets?" James asked. "Anything about the diamonds, for instance?"

"Wait till you are my husband," she said, "and then you may be as inquisitive as you please." Her amiable sweetheart's guess had actually hit the mark. During the year that had passed, she too had tried her luck among the Experts, and had failed. Having recently heard of a foreign interpreter of cyphers, she had written to ask his terms. The reply (just received) not only estimated his services at an extravagantly high rate, but asked cautious questions which it was not convenient to answer. Another attempt had been made to discover the mystery of the cypher, and made in vain.

James Bellbridge had his moments of

good-humour, and was on those rare occasions easily amused. He eyed the child with condescending curiosity. "Looks half starved," he said—as if he was considering the case of a stray cat. "Hullo, there! Buy a bit of bread." He tossed a penny to Syd as she left the room; and took the opportunity of binding his bargain with Syd's mother. "Mind! if I take you to New York, I'm not to be burdened with both your children. Is that girl the one you leave behind you?"

Mrs. Westerfield smiled sweetly, and answered: "Yes, dear."

7.—*The Cypher.*

An advertisement in the newspapers, addressed to persons skilled in the interpretation of cyphers, now represented Mrs. Westerfield's only chance of discovering

where the diamonds were hidden. The first answer that she received made some amends for previous disappointment. It offered references to gentlemen, whose names were in themselves a sufficient guarantee. She verified the references nevertheless, and paid a visit to her correspondent on the same day

His personal appearance was not in his favour—he was old and dirty, infirm and poor. His mean room was littered with shabby books. None of the ordinary courtesies of life seemed to be known to him ; he neither wished Mrs. Westerfield good-morning nor asked her to take a seat. When she attempted to enter into explanations relating to her errand, he rudely interrupted her. “Show me your cypher,” he said ; “I don’t promise to study it unless I find it worth my while.”

Mrs. Westerfield was alarmed. “Do you

mean that you want a large sum of money?" she asked.

"I mean that I don't waste my time on easy cyphers invented by fools."

She laid the slip of paper on his desk. "Waste your time on *that*," she said satirically, "and see how you like it!"

He examined it—first with his bleared red-rimmed eyes; then with a magnifying-glass. The only expression of opinion that escaped him was indicated by his actions. He shut up his book, and gloated over the signs and characters before him. On a sudden he looked at Mrs. Westerfield. "How did you come by this?" he asked.

"That's no business of yours."

"In other words, you have reasons of your own for not answering my question?"

"Yes."

Drawing his own inferences from that reply, he showed his three last-left yellow

teeth in a horrid grin. "I understand!" he said, speaking to himself. He looked at the cypher once more, and put another question: "Have you got a copy of this?"

It had not occurred to her to take a copy. He rose and pointed to his empty chair. His opinion of the cypher was, to all appearance, forced to express itself by the discovery that there was no copy.

"Do you know what might happen?" he asked. "The only cypher that has puzzled me for the last ten years might be lost—or stolen—or burnt if there was a fire in the house. You deserve to be punished for your carelessness. Make the copy yourself."

This desirable suggestion (uncivilly as it was expressed) had its effect upon Mrs. Westerfield. Her marriage depended on that precious slip of paper. She was confirmed in her opinion that this very dis-

agreeable man might nevertheless be a man to be trusted.

“ Shall you be long in finding out what it means?” she asked, when her task was completed.

He carefully compared the copy with the original—and then he replied :

“ Days may pass before I can find the clue ; I won’t attempt it unless you give me a week.”

She pleaded for a shorter interval. He coolly handed back her papers ; the original and the copy

“ Try somebody else,” he suggested—and opened his book again. Mrs. Westerfield yielded with the worst possible grace. In granting him the week of delay, she approached the subject of his fee for the second time. “ How much will it cost me?” she inquired.

“ I’ll tell you when I’ve done.”

“That won’t do! I must know the amount first.”

He handed her back her papers for the second time. Mrs. Westerfield’s experience of poverty had never been the experience of such independence as this. In sheer bewilderment, she yielded again. He took back the original cypher, and locked it up in his desk. “Call here this day week,” he said—and returned to his book.

“You are not very polite,” she told him, on leaving the room.

“At any rate,” he answered, “I don’t interrupt people when they are reading.”

The week passed.

Repeating her visit, Mrs. Westerfield found him still seated at his desk, still surrounded by his books, still careless of the polite attentions that he owed to a lady

“Well?” she asked, “have you earned your money?”

“I have found the clue.”

“What is it?” she burst out. “Tell me the substance. I can’t wait to read.”

He went on impenetrably with what he had to say. “But there are some minor combinations, which I have still to discover to my own satisfaction. I want a few days more.”

She positively refused to comply with this request. “Write down the substance of it,” she repeated, “and tell me what I owe you.”

He handed her back her cypher for the third time.

The woman who could have kept her temper, under such provocation as this, may be found when the mathematician is found who can square the circle, or the inventor who can discover perpetual motion. With a furious look, Mrs. Westerfield expressed her opinion of the philosopher in two words: “You brute!” She failed to produce the slightest impression on him.

“My work,” he proceeded, “must be well done or not done at all. This is Saturday, eleventh of the month. We will say the evening of Wednesday next.”

Mrs. Westerfield sufficiently controlled herself to be able to review her engagements for the coming week. On Thursday, the delay exacted by the marriage license would expire, and the wedding might take place. On Friday, the express train conveyed passengers to Liverpool, to be in time for the departure of the steamer for New York on Saturday morning. Having made these calculations, she asked, with sulky submission, if she was expected to call again on the Wednesday evening.

“No. Leave me your name and address. I will send you the cypher, interpreted, at eight o'clock.”

Mrs. Westerfield laid one of her visiting cards on his desk, and left him.

8.—*The Diamonds.*

The new week was essentially a week of events.

On the Monday morning, Mrs. Westerfield and her faithful James had their first quarrel. She took the liberty of reminding him that it was time to give notice of the marriage at the church, and to secure berths in the steamer for herself and her son. Instead of answering one way or another, James asked how the Expert was getting on.

“Has your old man found out where the diamonds are?”

“Not yet.”

“Then we’ll wait till he does.”

“Do you believe my word?” Mrs. Westerfield asked curtly.

James Bellbridge answered, with Roman brevity, “No.”

This was an insult; Mrs. Westerfield

expressed her sense of it. She rose, and pointed to the door. "Go back to America, as soon as you please," she said; "and find the money you want—if you can."

As a proof that she was in earnest she took her copy of the cypher out of the bosom of her dress, and threw it into the fire. "The original is safe in my old man's keeping," she added. "Leave the room."

James rose with suspicious docility, and walked out; having his own private ends in view.

Half an hour later, Mrs. Westerfield's old man was interrupted over his work by a person of bulky and blackguard appearance, whom he had never seen before.

The stranger introduced himself as a gentleman who was engaged to marry Mrs. Westerfield: he requested (not at all politely) to be permitted to look at the cypher. He was asked if he had brought

a written order to that effect, signed by the lady herself. Mr. Bellbridge, resting his fists on the writing-table, answered that he had come to look at the cypher, on his own sole responsibility, and that he insisted on seeing it immediately. "Allow me to show you something else first," was the reply he received to this assertion of his will and pleasure. "Do you know a loaded pistol, sir, when you see it?" The barrel of the pistol approached within three inches of the barman's big head as he leaned over the writing-table. For once in his life he was taken by surprise. It had never occurred to him that a professed interpreter of cyphers might sometimes be trusted with secrets which placed him in a position of danger, and might therefore have wisely taken measures to protect himself. No power of persuasion is comparable to the power possessed by a loaded pistol. James

left the room; and expressed his sentiments in language which has not yet found its way into any English Dictionary

But he had two merits, when his temper was in a state of repose. He knew when he was beaten; and he thoroughly appreciated the value of the diamonds. When Mrs. Westerfield saw him again, on the next day, he appeared with undeniable claims on her mercy. Notice of the marriage had been received at the church; and a cabin had been secured for her on board the steamer.

Her prospects being thus settled, to her own satisfaction, Mrs. Westerfield was at liberty to make her arrangements for the desertion of poor little Syd.

The person on whose assistance she could rely was an unmarried elder sister, distinguished as proprietor of a cheap girls' school in one of the suburbs of London.

This lady—known to local fame as Miss Wigger—had already proposed to take Syd into training as a pupil teacher. “I’ll force the child on,” Miss Wigger promised, “till she can earn her board and lodging by taking my lowest class. When she gets older she will replace my regular governess’ and I shall save the salary.”

With this proposal waiting for a reply, Mrs. Westerfield had only to inform her sister that it was accepted. “Come here,” she wrote, “on Friday next, at any time before two o’clock, and Syd shall be ready for you. P.S.—I am to be married again on Thursday, and start for America with my husband and my boy by next Saturday’s steamer.”

The letter was posted ; and the mother’s anxious mind was, to use her own phrase, relieved of another worry

As the hour of eight drew near on

Wednesday evening, Mrs. Westerfield's anxiety forced her to find relief in action of some kind. She opened the door of her sitting-room, and listened on the stairs. It still wanted a few minutes to eight o'clock, when there was a ring at the house-bell. She ran down to open the door. The servant happened to be in the hall, and answered the bell. The next moment the door was suddenly closed again.

"Anybody there?" Mrs. Westerfield asked.

"No, ma'am."

This seemed strange. Had the old wretch deceived her, after all? "Look in the letter-box," she called out. The servant obeyed, and found a letter. Mrs. Westerfield tore it open, standing on the stairs. It contained half a sheet of common note-paper. The interpretation of the cypher was written on it in these words :—

“Remember Number 12, Purbeck Road, St. John’s Wood. Go to the summer-house in the back garden. Count to the fourth plank in the floor, reckoning from the side wall on the right as you enter the summer house. Prize up the plank. Look under the mould and rubbish. Find the diamonds.”

Not a word of explanation accompanied these lines. Neither had the original cypher been returned. The strange old man had earned his money, and had not attended to receive it—had not even sent word where or how it might be paid ! Had he delivered his letter himself ? He (or his messenger) had gone before the house door could be opened !

A sudden suspicion of him turned her cold. Had he stolen the diamonds ? She was on the point of sending for a cab, and driving to his lodgings, when James came

in ; eager to know if the interpretation had arrived.

Keeping her suspicions to herself, she merely informed him that the interpretation was in her hands. He at once asked to see it. She refused to show it to him until he had made her his wife. "Put a chisel in your pocket, when we go to church, to-morrow morning," was the one hint she gave him. As thoroughly worthy of each other as ever, the betrothed lovers distrusted each other to the last.

At eleven o'clock the next morning they were united in the bonds of wedlock ; the landlord and the landlady of the public-house in which they had both served being the only witnesses present. The children were not permitted to see the ceremony. On leaving the church door, the married pair began their honeymoon by driving to St. John's Wood.

A dirty printed notice, in a broken window, announced that the House was To Let ; and a sour-tempered woman informed them that they were free to look at the rooms.

The bride was in the best of humours. She set the bridegroom the example of keeping up appearances by examining the dilapidated house first. This done, she said sweetly to the person in charge, "May we look at the garden?"

The woman made a strange answer to this request. "That's curious," she said.

James interfered for the first time. "What's curious?" he asked roughly.

"Among all the idle people who have come here, at one time or another, to see this house," the woman said; "only two have wanted to look at the garden."

James turned on his heel, and made for the summer-house, leaving it to his wife to

pursue the subject or not as she pleased. She did pursue the subject.

“ I am one of the persons, of course,” she said. “ Who is the other?”

“ An old man came on Monday ”

The bride's pleasant smile vanished.

“ What sort of person was he?” she asked.

The sour-tempered woman became sourer than ever. “ Oh, how can I tell! A brute. There!”

“ A brute?” The very words which the new Mrs. Bellbridge had herself used when the Expert had irritated her. With serious misgivings, she, too, turned her steps in the direction of the garden.

James had already followed her instructions and used his chisel. The plank lay loose on the floor. With both his big hands he rapidly cleared away the mould and the rubbish. In a few minutes the hiding-place was laid bare.

They looked into it. They looked at each other. There was the empty hole, telling its own story. The diamonds were gone.

9.—*The Mother.*

Mrs. Bellbridge eyed her husband, prepared for a furious outbreak of rage. He stood silent, staring stupidly straight before him. The shock that had fallen on his dull brain had stunned it. For the time, he was a big idiot—speechless, harmless, helpless.

She put back the rubbish, and replaced the plank, and picked up the chisel. “Come, James,” she said; “pull yourself together.” It was useless to speak to him. She took his arm, and led him out to the cab that was waiting at the door.

The driver, helping him to get in, noticed a piece of paper lying on the front seat. Advertisements, seeking publicity under all possible circumstances, are occa-

sionally set flying into the open windows of vehicles. The driver was about to throw the paper away, when Mrs. Bellbridge (seeing it on the other side) took it out of his hand. "It isn't print," she said; "it's writing." A closer examination showed that the writing was addressed to herself. Her correspondent must have followed her to the church, as well as to the house in St. John's Wood. He distinguished her by the name which she had changed that morning, under the sanction of the clergy and the law.

This was what she read: "Don't trouble yourself, madam, about the diamonds. You have made a mistake—you have employed the wrong man."

Those words—and no more. Enough, surely, to justify the conclusion that he had stolen the diamonds. Was it worth while to drive to his lodgings? They tried the

experiment. The Expert had gone away on business—nobody knew where.

The newspaper came as usual on Friday morning. To Mrs. Bellbridge's amazement it set the question of the theft at rest, on the highest authority. An article appeared, in a conspicuous position, thus expressed:

“ Another of the many proofs that truth is stranger than fiction has just occurred at Liverpool. A highly respected firm of shipowners in that city received a strange letter at the beginning of the present week. Premising that he had some remarkable circumstances to communicate, the writer of the letter entered abruptly on the narrative which follows: A friend of his—connected with literature—had, it appeared, noticed a lady's visiting card left on his desk, and had been reminded by it (in what way it was not necessary to explain) of a criminal case which had excited consider-

able public interest at the time, viz., the trial of Captain Westerfield for wilfully casting away a ship under his command. Never having heard of the trial, the writer, at his friend's suggestion, consulted a file of newspapers—discovered the report—and became aware, for the first time, that a collection of Brazilian diamonds, consigned to the Liverpool firm, was missing from the wrecked vessel when she had been boarded by the salvage party, and had not been found since. Events, which it was impossible for him to mention (seeing that doing so would involve a breach of confidence placed in him in his professional capacity), had revealed to his knowledge a hiding-place in which these same diamonds, in all probability, were concealed. This circumstance had left him no alternative, as an honest man, but to be beforehand with the persons, who (as he believed) contem-

plated stealing the precious stones. He had, accordingly, taken them under his protection, until they were identified and claimed by the rightful owners. In now appealing to these gentlemen, he stipulated that the claim should be set forth in writing, addressed to him under initials at a post-office in London. If the lost property was identified to his satisfaction, he would meet—at a specified place, and on a certain day and hour—a person accredited by the firm, and would personally restore the diamonds, without claiming (or consenting to receive) a reward. The conditions being complied with, this remarkable interview took place; the writer of the letter, described as an infirm old man very poorly dressed, fulfilled his engagement, took his receipt, and walked away without even waiting to be thanked. It is only an act of justice to add that the diamonds were afterwards

counted, and not one of them was missing."

Miserable, deservedly-miserable married pair! The stolen fortune, on which they had counted, had slipped through their fingers. The berths in the steamer for New York had been taken and paid for. James had married a woman with nothing besides herself to bestow on him, except an incumbrance in the shape of a boy

Late on the fatal wedding-day his first idea, when he was himself again after the discovery in the summer-house, was to get back his passage-money, to abandon his wife and his stepson, and to escape to America in a French steamer. He went to the office of the English company, and offered the places which he had taken for sale. The season of the year was against him; the passenger-traffic to America was at its lowest ebb, and profits depended

upon freights alone. If he still contemplated deserting his wife, he must also submit to sacrifice his money. The other alternative was (as he expressed it himself) to "have his pennyworth for his penny, and to turn his family to some good account in New York." He had not quite decided what to do when he got home again on the evening of his marriage.

At that critical moment in her life the bride was equal to the demand on her resources.

If she was foolish enough to allow James to act on his natural impulses, there were probably two prospects before her. In one state of his temper, he might knock her down. In another state of his temper, he might leave her behind him. Her only hope of protecting herself, in either case, was to tame the bridegroom. In his absence, she wisely armed herself with the

most irresistible fascinations of her sex. Never yet had he seen her dressed as she was dressed when he came home. Never yet had her magnificent eyes looked at him as they looked now. Emotions for which he was not prepared overcame this much-injured man : he stared at the bride in helpless surprise. That inestimable moment of weakness was all Mrs. Bellbridge asked for. Bewildered by his own transformation, James found himself reading the newspaper the next morning sentimentally, with his arm round his wife's waist.

By a refinement of cruelty, no one word had been said to prepare little Syd for the dreary change that was now close at hand in her young life. The poor child had seen the preparations for departure, and had tried to imitate her mother in packing up. She had collected her few morsels of

darned and ragged clothing, and had gone upstairs to put them into one of the dilapidated old trunks in the garret playground, when the servant was sent to bring her back to the sitting-room. There, enthroned in an easy-chair, sat a strange lady; and there, hiding behind the chair in undisguised dislike of the visitor, was her little brother Roderick. Syd looked timidly at her mother; and her mother said:

“ Here is your aunt.”

The personal appearance of Miss Wigger might have suggested a modest distrust of his own abilities to Lavater, when that self-sufficient man wrote his famous work on Physiognomy. Whatever betrayal of her inner self her face might have presented, in the distant time when she was young, was now completely overlaid by a surface of flabby fat which, assisted by green spec-

tacles, kept the virtues (or vices) of this woman's nature a profound secret until she opened her lips. When she used her voice, she let out the truth. Nobody could hear her speak, and doubt for a moment that she was an inveterately ill-natured woman.

"Make your curtsey, child!" said Miss Wigger. Nature had so toned her voice as to make it worthy of the terrors of her face. But for her petticoats, it would have been certainly taken for the voice of a man.

The child obeyed, trembling.

"You are to go away with me," the schoolmistress proceeded, "and to be taught to make yourself useful under my roof."

Syd seemed to be incapable of understanding the fate that was in store for her. She sheltered herself behind her merciless mother. "I'm going away with you, Mamma," she said—"with you and Rick."

Her mother took her by the shoulders, and pushed her across the room to her aunt.

The child looked at the formidable female creature with the man's voice and the green spectacles.

"You belong to me," said Miss Wigger, by way of encouragement, "and I have come to take you away." At those dreadful words, terror shook little Syd from head to foot. She fell on her knees with a cry of misery that might have melted the heart of a savage. "Oh, Mamma, Mamma, don't leave me behind! What have I done to deserve it? Oh, pray, pray, pray have some pity on me!"

Her mother was as selfish and as cruel a woman as ever lived. But even her hard heart felt faintly the influence of the most intimate and most sacred of all human relationships. Her florid cheeks turned pale. She hesitated.

Miss Wigger marked (through her own green medium) that moment of maternal indecision—and saw that it was time to assert her experience as an instructress of youth.

“Leave it to me,” she said to her sister. “You never did know, and you never will know, how to manage children.”

She advanced. The child threw herself shrieking on the floor. Miss Wigger's long arms caught her up—held her—shook her. “Be quiet, you imp!” It was needless to tell her to be quiet. Syd's little curly head sank on the schoolmistress's shoulder. She was carried into exile without a word or a cry—she had fainted.

10.—*The School.*

Time's march moves slowly, where weary lives languish in dull places.

Dating from one unkept and unacknow-

ledged birthday to another, Sydney Westerfield had attained the sixth year of her martyrdom at School. In that long interval no news of her mother, her brother, or her stepfather had reached England: she had received no letter, she had not even heard a report. Without friends and without prospects, Roderick Westerfield's daughter was, in the saddest sense of the word, alone in the world.

The hands of the ugly old clock in the schoolroom were approaching the time when the studies of the morning would come to an end. Wearily waiting for their release, the scholars saw an event happen which was a novelty in their domestic experience. The maid-of-all-work audaciously put her head in at the door, and interrupted Miss Wigger conducting the education of the first-class.

“If you please, miss, there’s a gentleman——”

Having uttered these introductory words, she was reduced to silence by the tremendous voice of her mistress.

“Haven’t I forbidden you to come here in school-hours? Go away directly!”

Hardened by a life of drudgery, under conditions of perpetual scolding, the servant stood her ground, and recovered the use of her tongue.

“There’s a gentleman in the drawing-room,” she persisted. Miss Wigger tried to interrupt her again. “And here’s his card!” she shouted, in a voice that was the loudest of the two.

Being a mortal creature, the school-mistress was accessible to the promptings of curiosity. She snatched the card out of the girl’s hand.

Mr. Herbert Linley, Mount Morven,

Perthshire. “ I don’t know this person,” Miss Wigger declared. “ You wretch, have you let a thief into the house ?”

“ A gentleman, if ever I see one yet,” the servant asserted.

“ Hold your tongue ! Did he ask for me ? Do you hear ?”

“ You told me to hold my tongue. No ; he didn’t ask for you.”

“ Then who did he want to see ?”

“ It’s on his card.”

Miss Wigger referred to the card again, and discovered (faintly traced in pencil) these words : “ To see Miss S. W ”

The schoolmistress instantly looked at Miss Westerfield. Miss Westerfield rose from her place at the head of her class.

The pupils, astonished at this daring act, all looked at the teacher—their natural enemy, appointed to supply them with undesired information derived from hated

books. They saw one of Mother Nature's favourite daughters ; designed to be the darling of her family, and the conqueror of hearts among men of all tastes and ages. But Sydney Westerfield had lived for six weary years in the place of earthly torment, kept by Miss Wigger under the name of a school. Every budding beauty, except the unassailable beauty of her eyes and her hair, had been nipped under the frosty superintendence of her maternal aunt. Her cheeks were hollow ; her delicate lips were pale ; her shabby dress lay flat over her bosom. Observant people, meeting her when she was out walking with the girls, were struck by her darkly gentle eyes, and by the patient sadness of her expression. "What a pity !" they said to each other. "She would be a pretty girl, if she didn't look so wretched and so thin."

At a loss to understand the audacity of

her teacher in rising before the class was dismissed, Miss Wigger began by asserting her authority. She did in two words :
“ Sit down !”

“ I wish to explain, ma'am.”

“ Sit down.”

“ I beg, Miss Wigger, that you will allow me to explain.”

“ Sydney Westerfield, you are setting the worst possible example to your class. I shall see this man myself. *Will* you sit down ?”

Pale already, Sydney turned paler still. She obeyed the word of command—to the high delight of the girls of her class. It was then within ten minutes of the half-hour after twelve—when the pupils were dismissed to the playground while the cloth was laid for dinner. What use would the teacher make of that half-hour of freedom ?

In the meanwhile Miss Wigger had entered her drawing - room. With the slightest possible inclination of her head, she eyed the stranger through her green spectacles. Even under that disadvantage his appearance spoke for itself. The servant's estimate of him was beyond dispute. Mr. Herbert Linley's good breeding was even capable of suppressing all outward expression of the dismay that he felt, on finding himself face to face with the formidable person who had received him.

“What is your business, if you please?” Miss Wigger began.

Men, animals, and buildings wear out with years, and submit to their hard lot. Time only meets with flat contradiction, when he ventures to tell a woman that she is growing old. Herbert Linley had rashly anticipated that the “young lady,” whom it was the object of his visit to see, would

prove to be young in the literal sense of the word. When he and Miss Wigger stood face to face, if the door had been set open for him, he would have left the house with the greatest pleasure.

“I have taken the liberty of calling,” he said, “in answer to an advertisement. May I ask”—he paused, and took a newspaper from the pocket of his overcoat—“if I have the honour of speaking to the lady who is mentioned here?”

He opened the newspaper, and pointed to the advertisement.

Miss Wigger’s eyes rested—not on the passage indicated, but on the visitor’s glove. It fitted him to such perfection that it suggested the enviable position in life which has gloves made to order. He politely pointed again. Still inaccessible to the newspaper, Miss Wigger turned her spectacles next to the front window of the room,

and discovered a handsome carriage waiting at the door. (Money evidently in the pockets of those beautiful trousers, worthy of the gloves!) As patiently as ever, Linley pointed for the third time, and drew Miss Wigger's attention in the right direction at last. She read the advertisement.

“A Young Lady wishes to be employed in the education of a little girl. Possessing but few accomplishments, and having been only a junior teacher at a school, she offers her services on trial, leaving it to her employer to pay whatever salary she may be considered to deserve, if she obtains a permanent engagement. Apply, by letter, to S. W., 14, Delta Gardens, N.E.”

“Most impertinent!” said Miss Wigger.

Mr. Linley looked astonished.

“I say, most impertinent!” Miss Wigger repeated.

Mr. Linley attempted to pacify this ter-

rible woman. "It's very stupid of me," he said ; " I am afraid I don't quite understand you."

" One of my teachers has issued an advertisement, and has referred to My address, without first consulting Me. Have I made myself understood, sir?" She looked at the carriage again, when she called him " sir."

Not even Linley's capacity for self-restraint could repress the expression of relief, visible in his brightening face, when he discovered that the lady of the advertisement and the lady who terrified him were two different persons.

" Have I made myself understood?" Miss Wigger repeated.

" Perfectly, Madam. At the same time, I am afraid I must own that the advertisement has produced a favourable impression on me."

“ I fail entirely to see why,” Miss Wigger remarked.

“ There is surely,” Linley pleaded, “ something straightforward—I might almost say, something innocent—in the manner in which the writer expresses herself. She seems to be singularly modest on the subject of her own attainments, and unusually considerate of the interests of others. I hope you will permit me——?”

Before he could add, “ to see the young lady,” the door was opened : a young lady entered the room.

Was she the writer of the advertisement? He felt sure of it, for no better reason than this: the moment he looked at her she interested him. It was an interest new to Linley, in his experience of himself. There was nothing to appeal to his admiration (by way of his senses) in the pale worn young creature who stood near the door, resigned

beforehand to whatever reception she might meet with. The poor teacher made him think of his happy young wife at home—of his pretty little girl, the spoilt child of the household. He looked at Sydney Westerfield with a heartfelt compassion which did honour to them both.

“What do you mean by coming here?” Miss Wigger inquired.

She answered gently, but not timidly. The tone in which the mistress had spoken had evidently not shaken her resolution, so far.

“I wish to know,” she said, “if this gentleman desires to see me, on the subject of my advertisement.”

“Your advertisement?” Miss Wigger repeated. “Miss Westerfield! how dare you beg for employment in a newspaper, without asking my leave?”

“I only waited to tell you what I had

done, till I knew whether my advertisement would be answered or not."

She spoke as calmly as before, still submitting to the insolent authority of the schoolmistress with a steady fortitude, very remarkable in any girl—and especially in a girl whose face revealed a sensitive nature. Linley approached her, and said his few kind words before Miss Wigger could assert herself for the third time.

"I am afraid I have taken a liberty in answering you personally, when I ought to have answered by letter. My only excuse is that I have no time to arrange for an interview, in London, by correspondence. I live in Scotland, and I am obliged to return by the mail to-night."

He paused. She was looking at him. Did she understand him?

She understood him only too well. For the first time, poor soul, in the miserable

years of her school life, she saw eyes that rested on her with the sympathy that is too truly felt to be uttered in words. The admirable resignation which had learnt its first hard lesson under her mother's neglect—which had endured, in after years, the daily persecution that heartless companionship so well knows how to inflict—failed to sustain her, when one kind look from a stranger poured its balm into the girl's sore heart. Her head sank; her wasted figure trembled; a few tears dropped slowly on the bosom of her shabby dress. She tried, desperately tried, to control herself. "I beg your pardon, sir," was all she could say; "I am not very well."

Miss Wigger tapped her on the shoulder and pointed to the door. "Are you well enough to see your way out?" she asked.

Linley turned on the wretch with a mind divided between wonder and disgust. "Good

God, what has she done to deserve being treated in that way?" he asked.

Miss Wigger's mouth widened ; Miss Wigger's forehead developed new wrinkles. To own it plainly, the schoolmistress smiled.

When it is of serious importance to a man to become acquainted with a woman's true nature—say, when he contemplates marriage—his one poor chance of arriving at a right conclusion is to find himself provoked by exasperating circumstances, and to fly into a passion. If the lady flies into a passion on her side, he may rely on it that her faults are more than balanced by her good qualities. If, on the other hand, she exhibits the most admirable self-control, and sets him an example which ought to make him ashamed of himself, he has seen a bad sign, and he will do well to remember it.

Miss Wigger's self-control put Herbert

Linley in the wrong, before she took the trouble of noticing what he had said.

“If you were not out of temper,” she replied, “I might have told you that I don’t allow my house to be made an office for the engagement of governesses. As it is, I merely remind you that your carriage is at the door.”

He took the only course that was open to him; he took his hat.

Sydney turned away to leave the room. Linley opened the door for her. “Don’t be discouraged,” he whispered as she passed him; “you shall hear from me.” Having said this, he made his parting bow to the schoolmistress. Miss Wigger held up a peremptory forefinger, and stopped him on his way out. He waited, wondering what she would do next. She rang the bell.

“You are in the house of a gentle-

woman," Miss Wigger explained. "My servant attends visitors, when they leave me." A faint smell of soap made itself felt in the room: the maid appeared, wiping her smoking arms on her apron. "Door. I wish you good morning"—were the last words of Miss Wigger.

Leaving the house, Linley slipped a bribe into the servant's hand. "I am going to write to Miss Westerfield," he said. "Will you see that she gets my letter?"

"That I will!"

He was surprised by the fervour with which the girl answered him. Absolutely without vanity, he had no suspicion of the value which his winning manner, his kind brown eyes, and his sunny smile had conferred on his little gift of money. A handsome man was an eighth wonder of the world, at Miss Wigger's school.

At the first stationer's shop that he

passed, he stopped the carriage, and wrote his letter.

“I shall be glad indeed if I can offer you a happier life than the life you are leading now. It rests with you to help me to do this. Will you send me the address of your parents, if they are in London, or the name of any friend with whom I can arrange to give you a trial as governess to my little girl? I am waiting your answer in the neighbourhood. If any hindrance should prevent you from replying at once, I add the name of the hotel at which I am staying—so that you may telegraph to me, before I leave London to-night.”

The stationer's boy, inspired by a private view of half-a-crown, set off at a run—and returned at a run with a reply.

“I have neither parents nor friends, and I have just been dismissed from my employment at the school. Without references to

speak for me, I must not take advantage of your generous offer. Will you help me to bear my disappointment, by permitting me to see you, for a few minutes only, at your hotel? Indeed, indeed, sir, I am not forgetful of what I owe to my respect for you, and my respect for myself. I only ask leave to satisfy you that I am not quite unworthy of the interest which you have been pleased to feel in, S. W."

In those sad words, Sydney Westerfield announced that she had completed her education.

THE STORY.

FIRST BOOK.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. PRESTY PRESENTS HERSELF.

NOT far from the source of the famous river, which rises in the mountains between Loch Katrine and Loch Lomond, and divides the Highlands and the Lowlands of Scotland, travellers arrive at the venerable grey walls of Mount Morven; and, after consulting their guide books, ask permission to see the house.

What would be called, in a modern place of residence, the first floor, is reserved for the occupation of the family. The great hall of entrance, and its quaint old fireplace; the ancient rooms on the same level

opening out of it, are freely shown to strangers. Cultivated travellers express various opinions relating to the family portraits, and the elaborately carved ceilings. The uninstructed public declines to trouble itself with criticism. It looks up at the towers and the loopholes, the battlements and the rusty old guns, which still bear witness to the perils of past times when the place was a fortress—it enters the gloomy hall, walks through the stone-paved rooms, stares at the faded pictures, and wonders at the lofty chimney-pieces hopelessly out of reach. Sometimes it sits on chairs which are as cold and as hard as iron, or timidly feels the legs of immovable tables which might be legs of elephants so far as size is concerned. When these marvels have been duly admired, and the guide books are shut up, the emancipated tourists, emerging into light and air, all find the same social

problem presented by a visit to Mount Morven : “ How can the family live in such a place as that ? ”

If these strangers on their travels had been permitted to ascend to the first floor, and had been invited (for example) to say good-night to Mrs. Linley’s pretty little daughter, they would have seen the stone walls of Kitty’s bedchamber snugly covered with velvet hangings which kept out the cold ; they would have trod on a doubly-laid carpet, which set the chilly influences of the pavement beneath it at defiance ; they would have looked at a bright little bed, of the last new pattern, worthy of a child’s deeply delicious sleep ; and they would only have discovered that the room was three hundred years old when they had drawn aside the window curtains, and had revealed the adamantine solidity of the outer walls. Or, if they had been allowed

to pursue their investigations a little farther, and had found their way next into Mrs. Linley's sitting-room, here again a transformation scene would have revealed more modern luxury, presented in the perfection which implies restraint within the limits of good taste. But on this occasion, instead of seeing the head of a lively little child on the pillow, side by side with the head of her doll, they would have encountered an elderly lady of considerable size, fast asleep and snoring in a vast arm-chair, with a book on her lap. The married men among the tourists would have recognised a mother-in-law, and would have set an excellent example to the rest; that is to say, the example of leaving the room.

The lady composed under the soporific influence of literature was a person of importance in the house—holding rank as Mrs. Linley's mother; and being otherwise

noticeable for having married two husbands, and survived them both.

The first of these gentlemen—the Right Honourable Joseph Norman—had been a member of Parliament, and had taken office under Government. Mrs. Linley was his one surviving child. He died at an advanced age ; leaving his handsome widow (young enough, as she was always ready to mention, to be his daughter) well provided for, and an object of matrimonial aspiration to single gentlemen who admired size in a woman, set off by money. After hesitating for some little time, Mrs. Norman accepted the proposal of the ugliest and dullest man among the ranks of her admirers. Why she became the wife of Mr. Presty (known in commercial circles as a merchant enriched by the sale of vinegar) she was never able to explain. Why she lamented him, with tears of sincere sorrow, when he died after

two years of married life, was a mystery which puzzled her nearest and dearest friends. And why, when she indulged (a little too frequently) in recollections of her married life, she persisted in putting obscure Mr. Presty on a level with distinguished Mr. Norman, was a secret which this remarkable woman had never been known to reveal. Presented by their widow with the strictest impartiality to the general view, the characters of these two husbands combined, by force of contrast, the ideal of manly perfection. That is to say, the vices of Mr. Norman were the virtues of Mr. Presty; and the vices of Mr. Presty were the virtues of Mr. Norman.

Returning to the sitting-room after bidding Kitty good-night, Mrs. Linley discovered the old lady asleep, and saw that the book on her mother's lap was sliding off. Before she could check the downward

movement, the book fell on the floor, and Mrs. Presty woke.

“Oh, Mamma, I am so sorry! I was just too late to catch it.”

“It doesn’t matter, my dear. I dare say I should go to sleep again, if I went on with my novel.”

“Is it really as dull as that?”

“Dull?” Mrs. Presty repeated. “You are evidently not aware of what the new school of novel writing is doing. The new school provides the public with soothing fiction.”

“Are you speaking seriously, Mamma?”

“Seriously, Catherine — and gratefully. These new writers are so good to old women. No story to excite our poor nerves ; no improper characters to cheat us out of our sympathies ; no dramatic situations to frighten us ; exquisite management of details (as the reviews say), and a

masterly anatomy of human motives which—I know what I mean, my dear, but I can't explain it."

"I think I understand, Mamma. A masterly anatomy of human motives which is in itself a motive of human sleep. No; I won't borrow your novel just now I don't want to go to sleep; I am thinking of Herbert in London."

Mrs. Presty consulted her watch.

"Your husband is no longer in London," she announced; "he has begun his journey home. Give me the railway guide, and I'll tell you when he will be here to-morrow. You may trust me, Catherine, to make no mistakes. Mr. Presty's wonderful knowledge of figures has been of the greatest use to me in later life. Thanks to his instructions, I am the only person in the house who can grapple with the intricacies of our railway system. Your poor father, Mr.

Norman, never could understand timetables, and never attempted to conceal his deficiencies. He had none of the vanity (harmless vanity, perhaps) which led poor Mr. Presty to express positive opinions on matters of which he knew nothing, such as pictures and music. What do you want, Malcolm?"

The servant to whom this question was addressed answered: "A telegram, ma'am, for the mistress."

Mrs. Linley recoiled from the message when the man offered it to her. Not usually a very demonstrative person, the feeling of alarm which had seized on her only expressed itself in a sudden change of colour. "An accident!" she said, faintly "An accident on the railway!"

Mrs. Presty opened the telegram.

"If you had been the wife of a Cabinet Minister," she said to her daughter, "you

would have been too well used to telegrams to let them frighten you. Mr. Presty (who received his telegrams at his office) was not quite just to the memory of my first husband. He used to blame Mr. Norman for letting me see his telegrams. But Mr. Presty's nature had all the poetry in which Mr. Norman's nature was deficient. He saw the angelic side of women — and thought telegrams and business, and all that sort of thing, unworthy of our mission. I don't exactly understand what our mission is——”

“Mamma! Mamma! is Herbert hurt?”

“Stuff and nonsense! Nobody is hurt; there has been no accident.”

“Then why does he telegraph to me?”

Hitherto, Mrs. Presty had only looked at the message. She now read it through attentively to the end. Her face assumed

an expression of stern distrust. She shook her head.

“Read it yourself,” she answered ; “and remember what I told you, when you trusted your husband to find a governess for my grandchild. I said : ‘You don’t know men as I do.’ I hope you may not live to repent it.”

Mrs. Linley was too fond of her husband to let this pass. “Why shouldn’t I trust him?” she asked. “He was going to London on business—and it was an excellent opportunity.”

Mrs. Presty disposed of this weak defence of her daughter’s conduct by waving her hand. “Read your telegram,” she repeated with dignity, “and judge for yourself.”

Mrs. Linley read :

“I have engaged a governess. She will travel in the same train with me. I think I ought to prepare you to receive a person

whom you may be surprised to see. She is very young, and very inexperienced ; quite unlike the ordinary run of governesses. When you hear how cruelly the poor girl has been used, I am sure you will sympathise with her as I do."

Mrs. Linley laid down the message, with a smile.

"Poor dear Herbert !" she said tenderly. "After we have been eight years married, is he really afraid that I shall be jealous? Mamma! Why are you looking so serious?"

Mrs. Presty took the telegram from her daughter, and read extracts from it with indignant emphasis of voice and manner.

"Travels in the same train with him. Very young, and very inexperienced. And he sympathises with her. Ha! I know the men, Catherine—I know the men!"

CHAPTER II.

THE GOVERNESS ENTERS.

MR. HERBERT LINLEY arrived at his own house in the forenoon of the next day Mrs. Linley, running out to the head of the stairs to meet her husband, saw him approaching her without a travelling companion. "Where is the governess?" she asked—when the first salutes allowed her an opportunity of speaking.

"On her way to bed, poor soul, under the care of the housekeeper," Linley answered.

"Anything infectious, my dear Herbert?" Mrs. Presty inquired, appearing at the breakfast-room door.

Linley addressed his reply to his wife :

“Nothing more serious, Catherine, than want of strength. She was in such a state of fatigue, after our long night journey, that I had to lift her out of the carriage.”

Mrs. Presty listened with an appearance of the deepest interest. “Quite a novelty in the way of a governess,” she said. “May I ask what her name is?”

“Sydney Westerfield.”

Mrs. Presty looked at her daughter and smiled satirically.

Mrs. Linley remonstrated.

“Surely,” she said, “you don’t object to the young lady’s name!”

“I have no opinion to offer, Catherine. I don’t believe in the name.”

“Oh, Mamma, do you suspect that it’s an assumed name?”

“My dear, I haven’t a doubt that it is. May I ask another question ?” the old lady

continued, turning to Linley "What references did Miss Westerfield give you?"

"No references at all."

Mrs. Presty rose with the alacrity of a young woman, and hurried to the door. "Follow my example," she said to her daughter, on her way out. "Lock up your jewel-box."

Linley drew a deep breath of relief when he was left alone with his wife. "What makes your mother so particularly disagreeable this morning?" he inquired.

"She doesn't approve, dear, of my leaving it to you to choose a governess for Kitty."

"Where is Kitty?"

"Out on her pony, for a ride over the hills. Why did you send a telegram, Herbert, to prepare me for the governess? Did you really think I might be jealous of Miss Westerfield?"

Linley burst out laughing. "No such

idea entered my head," he answered. "It isn't *in* you, my dear, to be jealous."

Mrs. Linley was not quite satisfied with this view of her character. Her husband's well-intended compliment reminded her that there are occasions when any woman may be jealous, no matter how generous and how gentle she may be. "We won't go quite so far as that," she said to him, "because——" She stopped, unwilling to dwell too long on a delicate subject. He jocosely finished the sentence for her. "Because we don't know what may happen in the future?" he suggested; making another mistake by making a joke.

Mrs. Linley returned to the subject of the governess.

"I don't at all say what my mother says," she resumed; "but was it not just a little indiscreet to engage Miss Westerfield without any references?"

“Unless I am utterly mistaken,” Linley replied, “you would have been quite as indiscreet, in my place. If you had seen the horrible woman who persecuted and insulted her——”

His wife interrupted him. “How did all this happen, Herbert? Who first introduced you to Miss Westerfield?”

Linley mentioned the advertisement, and described his interview with the schoolmistress. Having next acknowledged that he had received a visit from Miss Westerfield herself, he repeated all that she had been able to tell him of her father’s wasted life and melancholy end. Really interested by this time, Mrs. Linley was eager for more information. Her husband hesitated. “I would rather you heard the rest of it from Miss Westerfield,” he said—“in my absence.”

“Why in your absence?”

“Because she can speak to you more freely, when I am not present. Hear her tell her own story, and then let me know whether you think I have made a mistake. I submit to your decision beforehand, whichever way it may incline.”

Mrs. Linley rewarded him with a kiss. If a married stranger had seen them, at that moment, he would have been reminded of forgotten days—the days of his honeymoon.

“And now,” Linley resumed, “suppose we talk a little about ourselves. I haven’t seen my brother yet. Where is Randal?”

“Staying at the farm to look after your interests. We expect him to come back to-day. Ah, Herbert, what do we not all owe to that dear good brother of yours? There is really no end to his kindness. The last of our poor Highland families who have emigrated to America have had their

expenses privately paid by Randal. The wife has written to me, and has let out the secret. There is an American newspaper, among the letters that are waiting your brother's return, sent to him as a little mark of attention by these good grateful people." Having alluded to the neighbours who had left Scotland, Mrs. Linley was reminded of other neighbours who had remained. She was still relating events of local interest, when the clock interrupted her by striking the hour of the nursery dinner. What had become of Kitty? Mrs. Linley rose and rang the bell to make inquiries.

On the point of answering, the servant looked round at the open door behind him. He drew aside, and revealed Kitty, in the corridor, hand in hand with Sydney Westersfield—who timidly hesitated at entering the

room. "Here she is, Mamma," cried the child. "I think she's afraid of you; help me to pull her in."

Mrs. Linley advanced to receive the new member of her household, with the irresistible grace and kindness which charmed every stranger who approached her. "Oh, it's all right," said Kitty. "Syd likes me, and I like Syd. What do you think? She lived in London with a cruel woman who never gave her enough to eat. See what a good girl I am! I'm beginning to feed her already." Kitty pulled a box of sweetmeats out of her pocket, and handed it to the governess with a tap on the lid, suggestive of an old gentleman offering a pinch of snuff to a friend.

"My dear child, you mustn't speak of Miss Westerfield in that way! Pray excuse her," said Mrs. Linley, turning to Sydney

with a smile; "I am afraid she has been disturbing you in your room."

Sydney's silent answer touched the mother's heart; she kissed her little friend. "I hope you will let her call me Syd," she said gently; "it reminds me of a happier time." Her voice faltered; she could say no more. Kitty explained, with the air of a grown person encouraging a child. "I know all about it, Mamma. She means the time when her Papa was alive. She lost her Papa when she was a little girl like me. I didn't disturb her. I only said, 'My name's Kitty; may I get up on the bed?' And she was quite willing; and we talked. And I helped her to dress." Mrs. Linley led Sydney to the sofa, and stopped the flow of her daughter's narrative. The look, the voice, the manner of the governess had already made their simple appeal to her

generous nature. When her husband took Kitty's hand to lead her with him out of the room, she whispered as he passed: "You have done quite right; I haven't a doubt of it now!"

CHAPTER III.

MRS. PRESTY CHANGES HER MIND.

THE two ladies were alone.

Widely as the lot in life of one differed from the lot in life of the other, they presented a contrast in personal appearance which was more remarkable still. In the prime of life, tall and fair—the beauty of her delicate complexion and her brilliant blue eyes rivalled by the charm of a figure which had arrived at its mature perfection of development—Mrs. Linley sat side by side with a frail little dark-eyed creature, thin and pale, whose wasted face bore patient witness to the three cruellest priva-

tions under which youth can suffer—want of fresh air, want of nourishment, and want of kindness. The gentle mistress of the house wondered sadly if this lost child of misfortune was capable of seeing the brighter prospect before her that promised enjoyment of a happier life to come.

“I was afraid to disturb you while you were resting,” Mrs. Linley said. “Let me hope that my housekeeper has done what I might have done myself, if I had seen you when you arrived.”

“The housekeeper has been all that is good and kind to me, Madam.”

“Don’t call me ‘Madam;’ it sounds so formal—call me ‘Mrs. Linley’ You must not think of beginning to teach Kitty, till you feel stronger and better. I see but too plainly that you have not been happy. Don’t think of your past life, or speak of your past life.”

“Forgive me, Mrs. Linley; my past life is my one excuse for having ventured to come into this house.”

“In what way, my dear?”

At the moment when that question was put, the closed curtains which separated the breakfast-room from the library were softly parted in the middle. A keen old face, strongly marked by curiosity and distrust, peeped through—eyed the governess with stern scrutiny—and retired again into hiding. The introduction of a stranger (without references) into the intimacy of the family circle was, as Mrs. Presty viewed it, a crisis in domestic history. Conscience, with its customary elasticity, adapted itself to the emergency, and Linley’s mother-in-law stole information behind the curtain—in Linley’s best interests, it is quite needless to say.

The talk of the two ladies went on, with-

out a suspicion on either side that it was overheard by a third person.

Sydney explained herself.

“If I had led a happier life,” she said, “I might have been able to resist Mr. Linley’s kindness. I concealed nothing from him. He knew that I had no friends to speak for me; he knew that I had been dismissed from my employment at the school. Oh, Mrs. Linley, everything I said which would have made other people suspicious of me made *him* feel for me! I began to wonder whether he was an angel or a man. If he had not prevented it, I should have fallen on my knees before him. Hard looks and hard words I could have endured patiently, but I had not seen a kind look, I had not heard a kind word, for more years than I can reckon up. That is all I can say for myself; I leave the rest to your mercy.”

“Say my sympathy,” Mrs. Linley answered, “and you need say no more. But there is one thing I should like to know. You have not spoken to me of your mother. Have you lost both your parents?”

“No.”

“Then you were brought up by your mother?”

“Yes.”

“You surely had some experience of kindness when you were a child?”

A third short answer would have been no very grateful return for Mrs. Linley’s kindness. Sydney had no choice but to say plainly what her experience of her mother had been.

“Are there such women in the world!” Mrs. Linley exclaimed. “Where is your mother now?”

“In America—I think.”

“You think?”

“My mother married again,” said Sydney
“She went to America with her husband
and my little brother, six years ago.”

“And left you behind?”

“Yes.”

“And she has never written to you?”

“Never.”

This time, Mrs. Linley kept silence ; not without an effort. Thinking of Sydney’s mother — and for one morbid moment seeing her own little darling in Sydney’s place—she was afraid to trust herself to speak, while the first impression was vividly present to her mind.

“I will only hope,” she replied, after waiting a little, “that some kind person pitied and helped you when you were deserted. Any change must have been for the better after that. Who took charge of you?”

“My mother’s sister took charge of me ; an elder sister, who kept a school. The

time when I was most unhappy was the time when my aunt began to teach me. 'If you don't want to be beaten, and kept on bread and water,' she said, 'learn, you ugly little wretch, and be quick about it.' "

"Did she speak in that shameful way to the other girls?"

"Oh, no! I was taken into her school for nothing, and, young as I was, I was expected to earn my food and shelter by being fit to teach the lowest class. The girls hated me. It was such a wretched life that I hardly like to speak of it now. I ran away, and I was caught, and severely punished. When I grew older and wiser, I tried to find some other employment for myself. The elder girls bought penny journals that published stories. They were left about now and then in the bedrooms. I read the stories when I had the chance. Even my ignor-

ance discovered how feeble and foolish they were. They encouraged me to try if I could write a story myself; I couldn't do worse, and I might do better. I sent my manuscript to the editor. It was accepted and printed—but when I wrote and asked him if he would pay me something for it, he refused. Dozens of ladies, he said, wrote stories for him for nothing. It didn't matter what the stories were. Anything would do for his readers, so long as the characters were lords and ladies, and there was plenty of love in it. My next attempt to get away from the school ended in another disappointment. A poor old man, who had once been an actor, used to come to us twice a week, and get a few shillings by teaching the girls to read aloud. He was called 'Professor of English Literature,' and he taught out of a ragged book of verses which smelt of his pipe. I

learnt one of the pieces and repeated it to him, and asked if there was any hope of my being able to go on the stage. He was very kind ; he told me the truth. ‘ My dear, you have no dramatic ability ; God forbid you should go on the stage.’ I went back again to the penny journals, and tried a new editor. He seemed to have more money than the other one ; or perhaps he was kinder. I got ten shillings from him for my story. With that money I made my last attempt—I advertised for a situation as governess. If Mr. Linley had not seen my advertisement, I might have starved in the streets. When my aunt heard of it, she insisted on my begging her pardon before the whole school. Do girls get half maddened by persecution ? If they do, I think I must have been one of those girls. I refused to beg pardon ; and I was dismissed from my situation without a

character. Will you think me very foolish? I shut my eyes again, when I woke in my delicious bed to-day. I was afraid that the room, and everything in it, was a dream." She looked round, and started to her feet. "Oh, here's a lady! Shall I go away?"

The curtains hanging over the entrance to the library were opened for the second time. With composure and dignity, the lady who had startled Sydney entered the room.

"Have you been reading in the library?" Mrs. Linley asked. And Mrs. Presty answered: "No, Catherine; I have been listening."

Mrs. Linley looked at her mother; her lovely complexion reddened with a deep blush.

"Introduce me to Miss Westerfield," Mrs. Presty proceeded as coolly as ever.

Mrs. Linley showed some hesitation. What would the governess think of her

mother? Perfectly careless of what the governess might think, Mrs. Presty crossed the room and introduced herself.

“Miss Westerfield, I am Mrs. Linley’s mother. And I am, in one respect, a remarkable person. When I form an opinion, and find it’s the opinion of a fool, I am not in the least ashamed to change my mind. I have changed my mind about you. Shake hands.”

Sydney respectfully obeyed.

“Sit down again.”

Sydney returned to her chair.

“I had the worst possible opinion of you,” Mrs. Presty resumed, “before I had the pleasure of listening on the other side of the curtain. It has been my good fortune—what’s your Christian name? Did I hear it? or have I forgotten it? ‘Sydney,’ eh? Very well. I was about to say, Sydney, that it has been my good fortune to be

intimately associated, in early life, with two remarkable characters. Husbands of mine, in short, whose influence over me has, I am proud to say, set death and burial at defiance. Between them they have made my mind the mind of a man. I judge for myself. The opinions of others (when they don't happen to agree with mine) I regard as chaff to be scattered to the winds. No, Catherine, I am not wandering. I am pointing out to a young person, who has her way to make in the world, the vast importance, on certain occasions, of possessing an independent mind. If I had been ashamed to listen behind those curtains, there is no injury that my stupid prejudices might not have inflicted on this unfortunate girl. As it is, I have heard her story, and I do her justice. Count on me, Sydney, as your friend, and now get up again. My grandchild (never accustomed to wait for

anything since the day when she was born) is waiting dinner for you. She is at this moment shouting for her governess, as King Richard (I am a great reader of Shakespeare) once shouted for his horse. The maid (you will recognise her as a stout person suffering under tight stays) is waiting outside to show you the way to the nursery. *Au revoir*. Stop ! I should like to judge of the purity of your French accent. Say ‘au revoir’ to me. Thank you.—Weak in her French, Catherine,” Mrs. Presty pronounced, when the door had closed on the governess ; “but what can you expect, poor wretch, after such a life as she has led ? Now we are alone, I have a word of advice for your private ear. We have much to anticipate from Miss Westerfield that is pleasant and encouraging. But I don’t conceal it from myself or from you, we have also something to fear.”

“To fear?” Mrs. Linley repeated. “I don’t understand you.”

“Never mind, Catherine, whether you understand me or not. I want more information. Tell me what your husband said to you about this young lady.”

Wondering at the demon of curiosity which appeared to possess her mother, Mrs. Linley obeyed. Listening throughout with the closest attention, Mrs. Presty reckoned up the items of information, and pointed the moral to be drawn from them by worldly experience.

“First obstacle in the way of her moral development, her father—tried, found guilty, and dying in prison. Second obstacle, her mother—an unnatural wretch who neglected and deserted her own flesh and blood. Third obstacle, her mother’s sister—being her mother over again in an aggravated form. People who only look at the surface of

things might ask what we gain by investigating Miss Westerfield's past life. We gain this : we know what to expect of Miss Westerfield in the future."

"I for one," Mrs. Linley interposed, "expect everything that is good and true."

"Say she's naturally an angel," Mrs. Presty answered ; "and I won't contradict you. But do pray hear how my experience looks at it. I remember what a life she has led, and I ask myself if any human creature could have suffered as that girl has suffered without being damaged by it. Among those damnable people—I beg your pardon, my dear ; Mr. Norman sometimes used strong language, and it breaks out of me now and then—the good qualities of that unfortunate young person can *not* have always resisted the horrid temptations and contaminations about her. Hundreds of times she must have had deceit forced on

her ; she must have lied, through ungovernable fear ; she must have been left (at a critical time of her life, mind !) with no more warning against the insidious advances of the passions than——than——I'm repeating what Mr. Presty said of a niece of his own, who went to a bad school at Paris ; and I don't quite remember what comparisons that eloquent man used when he was excited. But I know what I mean. I like Miss Westerfield ; I believe Miss Westerfield will come out well in the end. But I don't forget that she is going to lead a new life here—a life of luxury, my dear ; a life of ease and health and happiness—and God only knows what evil seed sown in her, in her past life, may not spring up under new influences. I tell you we must be careful ; I tell you we must keep our eyes open. And so much the better for Her. And so much the better for Us."

Mrs. Presty's wise and wary advice (presented unfavourably, it must be owned, through her inveterately quaint way of expressing herself) failed to produce the right impression on her daughter's mind. Mrs. Linley replied in the tone of a person who was unaffectedly shocked.

"Oh, Mamma, I never knew you so unjust before! You can't have heard all that Miss Westerfield said to me. You don't know her, as I know her. So patient, so forgiving, so grateful to Herbert."

"So grateful to Herbert." Mrs. Presty looked at her daughter in silent surprise. There could be no doubt about it; Mrs. Linley failed entirely to see any possibilities of future danger in the grateful feeling of her sensitive governess towards her handsome husband. At this exhibition of simplicity, the old lady's last reserves of endurance gave way: she rose to go.

“ You have an excellent heart, Catherine,” she remarked ; “ but as for your head——”

“ Well, and what of my head?”

“ It’s always beautifully dressed, my dear, by your maid.” With that parting shot, Mrs. Presty took her departure by way of the library. Almost at the same moment, the door of the breakfast-room was opened. A young man advanced, and shook hands cordially with Mrs. Linley.

CHAPTER IV.

RANDAL RECEIVES HIS CORRESPONDENCE.

SELF-REVEALED by the family likeness as Herbert's brother, Randal Linley was nevertheless greatly Herbert's inferior in personal appearance. His features were in no way remarkable for manly beauty. In stature, he hardly reached the middle height; and, young as he was, either bad habit or physical weakness had so affected the upper part of his figure that he stooped. But with these, and other disadvantages, there was something in his eyes, and in his smile—the outward expression perhaps of all that was modestly noble in his nature—

so irresistible in its attractive influence that men, women, and children felt the charm alike. Inside of the house, and outside of the house, everybody was fond of Randal; even Mrs. Presty included.

“Have you seen a new face among us, since you returned?” were his sister-in-law’s first words. Randal answered that he had seen Miss Westerfield. The inevitable question followed. What did he think of her? “I’ll tell you in a week or two more,” he replied.

“No! tell me at once.”

“I don’t like trusting my first impression; I have a bad habit of jumping to conclusions.”

“Jump to a conclusion to please me. Do you think she’s pretty?”

Randal smiled and gave way. “Your governess,” he replied, “looks out of health, and (perhaps for that reason)

strikes me as being insignificant and ugly
Let us see what our fine air and our easy
life here will do for her. In so young a
woman as she is, I am prepared for any
sort of transformation. We may be all
admiring pretty Miss Westerfield before
another month is over our heads.—Have
any letters come for me while I have
been away?”

He went into the library, and returned
with his letters. “This will amuse Kitty,”
he said, handing to his sister-in-law the
illustrated New York newspaper, to which
she had already referred in speaking to her
husband.

Mrs. Linley examined the engravings—
and turned back again to look once more
at an illustration which had interested her.
A paragraph on the same page caught her
attention. She had hardly glanced at the
first words before a cry of alarm escaped

her. "Dreadful news for Miss Westerfield!" she exclaimed. "Read it, Randal."

He read these words:

"The week's list of insolvent traders includes an Englishman named James Bellbridge, formerly connected with a disreputable saloon in this city. Bellbridge is under suspicion of having caused the death of his wife in a fit of delirium tremens. The unfortunate woman had been married, for the first time, to one of the English aristocracy—the Honourable Roderick Westerfield — whose trial for casting away a ship under his command excited considerable interest in London some years since. The melancholy circumstances of the case are complicated by the disappearance, on the day of the murder, of the woman's young son by her first husband. The poor boy is supposed to have run away in terror from his miserable

home, and the police are endeavouring to discover some trace of him. It is reported that another child of the first marriage (a daughter) is living in England. But nothing is known about her."

"Has your governess any relations in England?" Randal asked.

"Only an aunt, who has treated her in the most inhuman manner."

"Serious news for Miss Westerfield, as you say," Randal resumed. "And, as I think, serious news for us. Here is a mere girl—a poor friendless creature—absolutely dependent on our protection. What are we to do if anything happens, in the future, to alter our present opinion of her?"

"Nothing of the sort is likely to happen," Mrs. Linley declared.

"Let us hope not," Randal said gravely

CHAPTER V

RANDAL WRITES TO NEW YORK.

THE members of the family at Mount Morven consulted together, before Sydney Westerfield was informed of her brother's disappearance and of her mother's death.

Speaking first, as master of the house, Herbert Linley offered his opinion without hesitation. His impulsive kindness shrank from the prospect of reviving the melancholy recollections associated with Sydney's domestic life. "Why distress the poor child, just as she is beginning to feel happy among us?" he asked. "Give me the

newspaper ; I shan't feel easy till I have torn it up."

His wife drew the newspaper out of his reach. "Wait a little," she said quietly ; "some of us may feel that it is no part of our duty to conceal the truth."

Mrs. Presty spoke next. To the surprise of the family council, she agreed with her son-in-law.

"Somebody must speak out," the old lady began ; "and I mean to set the example. Telling the truth," she declared, turning severely to her daughter, "is a more complicated affair than you seem to think. It's a question of morality, of course ; but—in family circles, my dear—it's sometimes a question of convenience as well. Is it convenient to upset my granddaughter's governess, just as she is entering on her new duties ? Certainly not ! Good Heavens, what does it matter to my young

friend Sydney whether her unnatural mother lives or dies ? Herbert, I second your proposal to tear up the paper with the greatest pleasure."

Herbert, sitting next to Randal, laid his hand affectionately on his brother's shoulder. "Are you on our side?" he asked. Randal hesitated.

"I feel inclined to agree with you," he said to Herbert. "It does seem hard to recall Miss Westerfield to the miserable life that she has led, and to do it in the way of all others which must try her fortitude most cruelly. At the same time——"

"Oh, don't spoil what you have said, by seeing the other side of the question !" cried his brother. "You have put it admirably ; leave it as it is."

"At the same time," Randal gently persisted, "I have heard no reasons which satisfy me that we have a right to keep

Miss Westerfield in ignorance of what has happened."

This serious view of the question in debate highly diverted Mrs. Presty "I do like that man," she announced, pointing to Randal; "he always amuses me. Look at him now! He doesn't know which side he is on, himself."

"He is on my side," Herbert declared.

"Not he!"

Herbert consulted his brother. "What do you say yourself?"

"I don't know," Randal answered.

"There!" cried Mrs. Presty. "What did I tell you?"

Randal tried to set his strange reply in the right light. "I only mean," he explained, "that I want a little time to think."

Herbert gave up the dispute, and appealed to his wife. "You have still got the

American newspaper in your hand," he said. "What do you mean to do with it?"

Quietly and firmly Mrs. Linley answered: "I mean to show it to Miss Westerfield."

"Against my opinion? Against your mother's opinion?" Herbert asked. "Have we no influence over you? Do as Randal does—take time, my dear, to think."

She answered this with her customary calmness of manner, and sweetness of tone. "I am afraid I must appear obstinate; but it is indeed true that I want no time to think; my duty is too plain to me."

Her husband and her mother listened to her in astonishment. Too amiable and too happy—and it must be added too indolent—to assert herself in the ordinary emergencies of family life, Mrs. Linley only showed of what metal she was made on the very rare occasions when the latent firmness in

her nature was stirred to its innermost depths. The general experience of this sweet-tempered and delightful woman, ranging over long intervals of time, was the only experience which remained in the memories of the persons about her. In bygone days, they had been amazed when her unexpected readiness and firmness of decision presented an exception to a general rule—just as they were amazed now

Herbert tried a last remonstrance. “Is it possible, Catherine, that you don’t see the cruelty of showing that newspaper to Miss Westerfield?”

Even this appeal to Mrs. Linley’s sympathies failed to shake her resolution. “You may trust me to be careful,” was all she said in reply; “I shall prepare her as tenderly for the sad news from America, as if she was a daughter of my own.”

Hearing this, Mrs. Presty showed a

sudden interest in the proceedings. "When do you mean to begin?" she asked.

"At once, Mamma."

Mrs. Presty broke up the meeting on the spot. "Wait till I am out of the way," she stipulated. "Do you object to Herbert giving me his arm? Distressing scenes are not in his line or in mine."

Mrs. Linley made no objection. Herbert resigned himself (not at all unwillingly) to circumstances. Arm in arm, he and his wife's mother left the room.

Randal showed no intention of following them; he had given himself time to think. "We are all wrong, Catherine," he said; "and you alone are right. What can I do to help you?"

She took his hand gratefully. "Always kind! Never thinking of yourself! I will see Miss Westerfield in my own room. Wait here, in case I want you."

After a much shorter absence than Randal anticipated, Mrs. Linley returned. "Has it been very distressing?" he asked, seeing the traces of tears in her eyes.

"There are noble qualities," she answered, "in that poor ill-used girl. Her one thought, as soon as she began to understand my motive in speaking to her, was not for herself, but for me. Even you, a man, must have felt the tears in your eyes, if you had heard her promise that I should suffer no further anxiety on her account. 'You shall see no distressing change in me,' she said, 'when we meet to-morrow' All she asked was to be left in her room for the rest of the day. I feel sure of her resolution to control herself; and yet I should like to encourage her if I can. Her chief sorrow (as it seems to me) must be—not for the mother who has so shamefully neglected her—but for the poor little

brother, a castaway lost in a strange land. Can we do nothing to relieve her anxiety?"

"I can write," Randal said, "to a man whom I know in New York; a lawyer in large practice."

"The very person we want! Write—pray write by to-day's post!"

The letter was despatched. It was decided—and wisely decided, as the result proved—to say nothing to Sydney until the answer was received. Randal's correspondent wrote back with as little delay as possible. He had made every inquiry, without success. Not a trace of the boy had been found, or (in the opinion of the police) was likely to be found. The one event that had happened, since the appearance of the paragraph in the New York journal, was the confinement of James Bellbridge in an asylum, as a madman under restraint without hope of recovery.

CHAPTER VI.

SYDNEY TEACHES.

MRS. PRESTY had not very seriously exaggerated the truth, when she described her much-indulged granddaughter as “a child who had never been accustomed to wait for anything since the day when she was born.”

Governesses in general would have found it no easy matter to produce a favourable impression on Kitty, and to exert the necessary authority in instructing her, at the same time. Spoilt children (whatever moralists may say to the contrary) are companionable and affectionate children, for the most part—except when they encounter

the unfortunate persons employed to introduce them to useful knowledge. Mr. and Mrs. Linley (guiltily conscious of having been too fond of their only child to subject her to any sort of discipline) were not very willing to contemplate the prospect before Miss Westerfield on her first establishment in the schoolroom. To their surprise and relief there proved to be no cause for anxiety after all. Without making an attempt to assert her authority, the new governess succeeded nevertheless when older and wiser women would have failed.

The secret of Sydney's triumph over adverse circumstances lay hidden in Sydney herself.

Everything in the ordinary routine of life at Mount Morven was a source of delight and surprise to the unfortunate creature who had passed through six years of cruelty, insult, and privation at her aunt's

school. Look where she might, in her new sphere of action, she saw pleasant faces, and heard kind words. At meal times, wonderful achievements in the art of cookery appeared on the table which she had not only never tasted, but never even heard of. When she went out walking with her pupil they were free to go where they pleased, without restriction of time—except the time of dinner. To breathe the delicious air, to look at the glorious scenery, were enjoyments so exquisitely exhilarating that, by Sydney's own confession, she became quite lightheaded with pleasure. She ran races with Kitty—and nobody reproved her. She rested, out of breath, while the stronger child was ready to run on—and no merciless voice cried, "None of your laziness; time's up!" Wild flowers that she had never yet seen might be gathered, and no offence was committed. Kitty told her the

names of the flowers, and the names of the summer insects that flashed and hummed in the hillside breezes; and was so elated at teaching her governess that her rampant spirits burst out in singing. "Your turn next," the joyous child cried, when she too was out of breath. "Sing, Sydney—sing!" Alas for Sydney! She had not sung since those happiest days of her childhood, when her good father had told her fairy stories, and taught her songs. They were all forgotten now. "I can't sing, Kitty; I can't sing." The pupil, hearing this melancholy confession, became governess once more. "Say the words, Syd; and hum the tune after me." They laughed over the singing lesson, until the echoes of the hills mocked them, and laughed too. Looking into the schoolroom, one day, Mrs. Linley found that the serious business of teaching was not neglected. The lessons

went on smoothly, without an obstacle in the way. Kitty was incapable of disappointing her friend and playfellow, who made learning easy with a smile and a kiss. The balance of authority was regulated to perfection in the lives of these two simple creatures. In the schoolroom, the governess taught the child. Out of the schoolroom, the child taught the governess. Division of labour was a principle in perfect working order at Mount Morven—and nobody suspected it! But, as the weeks followed each other, one more remarkable circumstance presented itself which every person in the household was equally quick to observe. The sad Sydney Westerfield whom they all pitied, had now become the pretty Sydney Westerfield whom they all admired. It was not merely a change—it was a transformation. Kitty stole the handglass from her mother's room, and insisted that her

governess should take it, and look at herself. "Papa says you're as plump as a partridge; and Mamma says you're as fresh as a rose; and Uncle Randal wags his head, and tells them he saw it from the first. I heard it all when they thought I was playing with my doll—and I want to know, you best of nice girls, what you think of your own self?"

"I think, my dear, it's time we went on with our lessons."

"Wait a little, Syd; I have something else to say."

"What is it?"

"It's about Papa. He goes out walking with us—doesn't he?"

"Yes."

"He didn't go out walking with me—before you came here. I've been thinking about it, and I'm sure Papa likes you. What are you looking in the drawer for?"

“For your lesson-books, dear.”

“Yes—but I haven’t quite done yet. Papa talks a good deal to you, and you don’t talk much to Papa. Don’t you like him?”

“Oh, Kitty!”

“Then you do like him?”

“How can I help liking him? I owe all my happiness to your Papa.”

“Do you like him better than Mamma?”

“I should be very ungrateful, if I liked anybody better than your Mamma.”

Kitty considered a little, and shook her head. “I don’t understand that,” she declared roundly “What do you mean?”

Sydney cleaned the pupil’s slate, and set the pupil’s sum—and said nothing.

Kitty placed a suspicious construction of her own on her governess’s sudden silence. “Perhaps you don’t like my wanting to

know so many things," she suggested. "Or perhaps you meant to puzzle me?"

Sydney sighed, and answered, "I'm puzzled myself."

CHAPTER VII.

SYDNEY SUFFERS.

IN the autumn holiday-time friends in the south, who happened to be visiting Scotland, were invited to stop at Mount Morven on their way to the Highlands ; and were accustomed to meet the neighbours of the Linleys at dinner on their arrival. The time for this yearly festival had now come round again ; the guests were in the house ; and Mr. and Mrs. Linley were occupied in making their arrangements for the dinner-party. With her unfailing consideration for everyone about her, Mrs. Linley did not forget Sydney while she was sending out her

cards of invitation. "Our table will be full at dinner," she said to her husband; "Miss Westerfield had better join us in the evening with Kitty."

"I suppose so," Linley answered with some hesitation.

"You seem to doubt about it, Herbert. Why?"

"I was only wondering——"

"Wondering about what?"

"Has Miss Westerfield got a gown, Catherine, that will do for a party?"

Linley's wife looked at him as if she doubted the evidence of her own senses. "Fancy a man thinking of that!" she exclaimed. "Herbert, you astonish me."

He laughed uneasily. "I don't know how I came to think of it—unless it is, that she wears the same dress every day. Very neat; but (perhaps I'm wrong) a little shabby too."

“Upon my word, you pay Miss Westerfield a compliment which you have never paid to me! Wear what I may, you never seem to know how *I* am dressed.”

“I beg your pardon, Catherine, I know that you are always dressed well.”

That little tribute restored him to his place in his wife’s estimation. “I may tell you now,” she resumed, with her gentle smile, “that you only remind me of what I had thought of already. My milliner is at work for Miss Westerfield. The new dress must be your gift.”

“Are you joking?”

“I am in earnest. To-morrow is Sydney’s birthday; and here is *my* present.” She opened a jeweller’s case, and took out a plain gold bracelet. “Suggested by Kitty,” she added, pointing to an inlaid miniature-portrait of the child. Herbert read the inscription: *To Sydney Westerfield, with Catherine*

Linley's love. He gave the bracelet back to his wife in silence ; his manner was more serious than usual—he kissed her hand.

The day of the dinner-party marked an epoch in Sydney's life.

For the first time, in all her past experience, she could look in the glass, and see herself prettily dressed, with a gold bracelet on her arm. If we consider how men (in one way) and milliners (in another) profit by it, vanity is surely to be reckoned, not among the vices but among the virtues of the sex. Will any woman, who speaks the truth, hesitate to acknowledge that her first sensations of gratified vanity rank among the most exquisite and most enduring pleasures that she has ever felt ? Sydney locked her door, and exhibited herself to herself—in the front view, the side view, and the back view (over the shoulder) with eyes that sparkled and

cheeks that glowed in a delicious confusion of pride and astonishment. She practised bowing to strangers, in her new dress ; she practised shaking hands gracefully, with her bracelet well in view. Suddenly she stood still before the glass, and became serious and thoughtful. Kind and dear Mr. Linley was in her mind now. While she was asking herself anxiously what he would think of her, Kitty—arranged in *her* new finery, as vain and as happy as her governess—drummed with both fists outside the door, and announced at the top of her voice that it was time to go downstairs. Sydney's agitation at the prospect of meeting the ladies in the drawing-room added a charm of its own to the flush that her exercises before the glass had left on her face. Shyly following instead of leading her little companion into the room, she presented such a charming appearance of youth and beauty

that the ladies paused in their talk to look at her. Some few admired Kitty's governess with generous interest; the greater number doubted Mrs. Linley's prudence in engaging a girl so very pretty and so very young. Little by little, Sydney's manner—simple, modest, shrinking from observation—pleaded in her favour even with the ladies who had been prejudiced against her at the outset. When Mrs. Linley presented her to the guests, the most beautiful woman among them (Mrs. MacEdwin) made room for her on the sofa, and with perfect tact and kindness set the stranger at her ease. When the gentlemen came in from the dinner-table, Sydney was composed enough to admire the brilliant scene, and to wonder again, as she had wondered already, what Mr. Linley would say to her new dress.

Mr. Linley certainly did notice her—at a distance.

He looked at her with a momentary fervour of interest and admiration which made Sydney (so gratefully and so guiltlessly attached to him) tremble with pleasure ; he even stepped forward as if to approach her, checked himself, and went back again among his guests. Now in one part of the room, and now in another, she saw him speaking to them. The one neglected person whom he never even looked at again, was the poor girl to whom his approval was the breath of her life. Had she ever felt as unhappy as she felt now? No, not even at her aunt's school!

Friendly Mrs. MacEdwin touched her arm. "My dear, you are losing your pretty colour. Are you overcome by the heat? Shall I take you into the next room?"

Sydney expressed her sincere sense of the lady's kindness. Her commonplace excuse

was a true excuse—she had a headache ; and she asked leave to retire to her room.

Approaching the door, she found herself face to face with Mr. Linley. He had just been giving directions to one of the servants, and was re-entering the drawing-room. She stopped, trembling and cold ; but, in the very intensity of her wretchedness, she found courage enough to speak to him.

“ You seem to avoid me, Mr. Linley,” she began, addressing him with ceremonious respect, and keeping her eyes on the ground. “ I hope——” she hesitated, and desperately looked at him—“ I hope I haven’t done anything to offend you?”

In her knowledge of him, up to that miserable evening, he constantly spoke to her with a smile. She had never yet seen him so serious and so inattentive as he was now. His eyes, wandering round the room, rested on Mrs. Linley — brilliant and

beautiful, and laughing gaily. Why was he looking at his wife with plain signs of embarrassment in his face? Sydney piteously persisted in repeating her innocent question : “I hope I haven’t done anything to offend you?”

He seemed to be still reluctant to notice her—on the one occasion of all others when she was looking her best! But he answered at last.

“My dear child, it is impossible that you should offend me : you have misunderstood and mistaken me. Don’t suppose—pray don’t suppose that I am changed or can ever be changed towards you.” He emphasised the kind intention which those words revealed by giving her his hand.

But the next moment he drew back. There was no disguising it, he drew back as if he wished to get away from her. She

noticed that his lips were firmly closed and his eyebrows knitted in a frown : he looked like a man who was forcing himself to submit to some hard necessity that he hated or feared.

Sydney left the room in despair.

He had denied in the plainest and kindest terms that he was changed towards her. Was that not enough? It was nothing like enough. The facts were there to speak for themselves : he was an altered man ; anxiety, sorrow, remorse—one or the other seemed to have got possession of him. Judging by Mrs. Linley's gaiety of manner, his wife could not possibly have been taken into his confidence.

What did it mean? Oh, the useless, hopeless question! And yet, again and again she asked herself: what did it mean?

In bewildered wretchedness she lingered

on the way to her room, and stopped at the end of a corridor.

On her right hand, a broad flight of old oak stairs led to the bed-chambers on the second floor of the house. On her left hand, an open door showed the stone steps which descended to the terrace and the garden. The moonlight lay in all its loveliness on the flower-beds and the grass, and tempted her to pause and admire it. A prospect of sleepless misery was the one prospect before her that Sydney could see, if she retired to rest. The cool night air came freshly up the vaulted tunnel in which the steps were set ; the moonlit garden offered its solace to the girl's sore heart. No curious women-servants appeared on the stairs that led to the bed-chambers. No inquisitive eyes could look at her from the windows of the ground floor—a solitude

abandoned to the curiosity of tourists. Sydney took her hat and cloak from the stand in a recess at the side of the door, and went into the garden.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. PRESTY MAKES A DISCOVERY.

THE dinner-party had come to an end ; the neighbours had taken their departure ; and the ladies at Mount Morven had retired for the night.

On the way to her room Mrs. Presty knocked at her daughter's door. "I want to speak to you, Catherine. Are you in bed?"

"No, Mamma. Come in."

Robed in a dressing-gown of delicately-mingled white and blue, and luxuriously accommodated on the softest pillows that could be placed in an arm-chair, Mrs.

Linley was meditating on the events of the evening. "This has been the most successful party we have ever given," she said to her mother. "And did you notice how charmingly pretty Miss Westerfield looked in her new dress?"

"It's about that girl I want to speak to you," Mrs. Presty answered severely. "I had a higher opinion of her when she first came here than I have now "

Mrs. Linley pointed to an open door, communicating with a second and smaller bed-chamber. "Not quite so loud," she answered, "or you may wake Kitty. What has Miss Westerfield done to forfeit your good opinion?"

Discreet Mrs. Presty asked leave to return to the subject at a future opportunity.

"I will merely allude now," she said, "to a change for the worse in your governess, which you might have noticed

when she left the drawing-room this evening. She had a word or two with Herbert at the door ; and she left him looking as black as thunder."

Mrs. Linley laid herself back on her pillows, and burst out laughing. "Black as thunder? Poor little Sydney, what a ridiculous description of her! I beg your pardon, Mamma ; don't be offended."

"On the contrary, my dear, I am agreeably surprised. Your poor father—a man of remarkable judgment on most subjects—never thought much of your intelligence. He appears to have been wrong ; you have evidently inherited some of my sense of humour. However, that is not what I wanted to say ; I am the bearer of good news. When we find it necessary to get rid of Miss Westerfield——"

Mrs. Linley's indignation expressed itself by a look which, for the moment at least,

reduced her mother to silence. Always equal to the occasion, however, Mrs. Presty's face assumed an expression of innocent amazement, which would have produced a round of applause on the stage. "What have I said to make you angry?" she inquired. "Surely, my dear, you and your husband are very extraordinary people."

"Do you mean to tell me, Mamma, that you have said to Herbert what you said just now to me?"

"Certainly. I mentioned it to Herbert in the course of the evening. He was excessively rude. He said, 'Tell Mrs. MacEdwin to mind her own business—and set her the example yourself.' "

Mrs. Linley returned her mother's look of amazement, without her mother's eye for dramatic effect. "What has Mrs. MacEdwin to do with it?" she asked.

“ If you will only let me speak, Catherine, I shall be happy to explain myself. You saw Mrs. MacEdwin talking to me at the party. That good lady’s head—a feeble head, as all her friends admit—has been completely turned by Miss Westerfield. ‘The first duty of a governess’ (this foolish woman said to me) ‘is to win the affections of her pupils. *My* governess has entirely failed to make the children like her. A dreadful temper ; I have given her notice to leave my service. Look at that sweet girl and your little granddaughter ! I declare I could cry when I see how they understand each other and love each other.’ I quote our charming friend’s nonsense, verbatim (as we used to say when we were in Parliament in Mr. Norman’s time), for the sake of what it led to. If, by any lucky chance, Miss Westerfield happens to be disengaged in the future, Mrs. Mac-

Edwin's house is open to her—at her own time, and on her own terms. I promised to speak to you on the subject, and I perform my promise. Think over it ; I strongly advise you to think over it.”

Even Mrs. Linley's good-nature declined to submit to this. “I shall certainly not think over what cannot possibly happen,” she said. “Good-night, Mamma.”

“Good-night, Catherine. Your temper doesn't seem to improve as you get older. Perhaps the excitement of the party has been too much for your nerves. Try to get some sleep before Herbert comes up from the smoking-room and disturbs you.”

Mrs. Linley refused even to let this pass unanswered. “Herbert is too considerate to disturb me, when his friends keep him up late,” she said. “On those occasions, as you may see for yourself, he has a bed in his dressing-room.”

Mrs. Presty passed through the dressing-room on her way out. "A very comfortable-looking bed," she remarked, in a tone intended to reach her daughter's ears. "I wonder Herbert ever leaves it."

The way to her own bed-chamber led her by the door of Sydney's room. She suddenly stopped; the door was not shut. This was in itself a suspicious circumstance.

Young or old, ladies are not in the habit of sleeping with their bedroom doors ajar. A strict sense of duty led Mrs. Presty to listen outside. No sound like the breathing of a person asleep was to be heard. A strict sense of duty conducted Mrs. Presty next into the room, and even encouraged her to approach the bed on tip-toe. The bed was empty; the clothes had not been disturbed since it had been made in the morning!

The old lady stepped out into the corridor

in a state of excitement, which greatly improved her personal appearance. She looked almost young again as she mentally reviewed the list of vices and crimes which a governess might commit, who had retired before eleven o'clock, and who was not in her bedroom at twelve. On further reflection, it appeared to be barely possible that Miss Westerfield might be preparing her pupil's exercises for the next day. Mrs. Presty descended to the schoolroom, on the first floor.

No. Here again, there was nothing to see but an empty room.

Where was Miss Westerfield?

Was it within the limits of probability that she had been bold enough to join the party in the smoking-room? The bare idea was absurd.

In another minute, nevertheless, Mrs. Presty was at the door, listening. The

men's voices were loud : they were talking politics. She peeped through the keyhole ; the smokers had, beyond all doubt, been left to themselves. If the house had not been full of guests, Mrs. Presty would now have raised an alarm. As things were, the fear of a possible scandal which the family might have reason to regret, forced her to act with caution. In the suggestive retirement of her own room, she arrived at a wise and wary decision. Opening her door by a few inches, she placed a chair behind the opening in a position which commanded a view of Sydney's room. Wherever the governess might be, her return to her bed-chamber, before the servants were astir in the morning, was a chance to be counted on. The night-lamp in the corridor was well alight ; and a venerable person, animated by a sense of duty, was a person naturally superior to

the seductions of sleep. Before taking the final precaution of extinguishing her candle, Mrs. Presty touched up her complexion, and resolutely turned her back on her nightcap. "This is a case in which I must keep up my dignity;" she decided as she took her place in the chair.

One man in the smoking-room appeared to be thoroughly weary of talking politics. That man was the master of the house.

Randal noticed the worn pre-occupied look in his brother's face, and determined to break up the meeting. The opportunity for which he was waiting occurred in another minute. He was asked as a moderate politician to decide between two guests, both members of Parliament, who were fast drifting into mere contradiction of each other's second-hand opinions. In plain terms they stated the matter in dispute :

“Which of our political parties deserves the confidence of the English people?” In plain terms, on his side, Randal answered: “The party that lowers the taxes.” Those words acted on the discussion like water on a fire. As members of Parliament, the two contending politicians were naturally innocent of the slightest interest in the people or the taxes; they received the new idea submitted to them in helpless silence. Friends who were listening began to laugh. The oldest man present looked at his watch. In five minutes more the lights were out, and the smoking-room was deserted.

Linley was the last to retire—fevered by the combined influences of smoke and noise. His mind, oppressed all through the evening, was as ill at ease as ever. Linger-
ing, wakeful and irritable, in the corridor (just as Sydney had lingered before him), he too stopped at the open door,

and admired the peaceful beauty of the garden.

The sleepy servant, appointed to attend in the smoking-room, asked if he should close the door. Linley answered, "Go to bed, and leave it to me." Still lingering at the top of the steps, he too was tempted by the refreshing coolness of the air. He took the key out of the lock; secured the door after he had passed through it; put the key in his pocket, and went down into the garden.

CHAPTER IX.

SOMEBODY ATTENDS TO THE DOOR.

WITH slow steps Linley crossed the lawn; his mind gloomily absorbed in thoughts which had never before troubled his easy nature—thoughts heavily laden with a burden of self-reproach.

Arrived at the limits of the lawn, two paths opened before him. One led into a quaintly pretty enclosure, cultivated on the plan of the old gardens at Versailles, and called the French Garden. The other path led to a grassy walk, winding its way capriciously through a thick shrubbery. Careless in what direction he turned his

steps, Linley entered the shrubbery, because it happened to be nearest to him.

Except at certain points, where the moonlight found its way through open spaces in the verdure, the grassy path which he was now following wound onward in shadow. How far he had advanced he had not noticed, when he heard a momentary rustling of leaves at some little distance in advance of him. The faint breeze had died away; the movement among the leaves had been no doubt produced by the creeping or the flying of some creature of the night. Looking up, at the moment when he was disturbed by this trifling incident, he noticed a bright patch of moonlight ahead as he advanced to a new turn in the path.

The instant afterwards he was startled by the appearance of a figure, emerging into the moonlight from the farther end of the shrubbery, and rapidly approaching

him. He was near enough to see that it was the figure of a woman. Was it one of the female servants, hurrying back to the house after an interview with a sweetheart? In his black evening-dress, he was, in all probability, completely hidden by the deep shadow in which he stood. Would he be less likely to frighten the woman if he called to her than if he allowed her to come close up to him in the dark? He decided on calling to her.

“Who is out so late?” he asked.

A cry of alarm answered him. The figure stood still for a moment, and then turned back as if to escape him by flight.

“Don’t be frightened,” he said. “Surely you know my voice?”

The figure stood still again. He showed himself in the moonlight, and discovered—Sydney Westerfield.

“You!” he exclaimed.

She trembled ; the words in which she answered him were words in fragments.

“ The garden was so quiet and pretty—I thought there would be no harm—please let me go back—I’m afraid I shall be shut out——”

She tried to pass him. “ My poor child,” he said, “ what is there to be frightened about? I have been tempted out by the lovely night, like you. Take my arm. It is so close in here among the trees. If we go back to the lawn, the air will come to you freely.”

She took his arm ; he could feel her heart throbbing against it. Kindly silent, he led her back to the open space. Some garden chairs were placed here and there : he suggested that she should rest for awhile.

“ I’m afraid I shall be shut out,” she repeated. “ Pray let me get back.”

He yielded at once to the wish that she

expressed. "You must let me take you back," he explained. "They are all asleep at the house by this time. No! no! don't be frightened again. I have got the key of the door. The moment I have opened it, you shall go in by yourself."

She looked at him gratefully. "You are not offended with me now, Mr. Linley," she said. "You are like your kind self again."

They ascended the steps which led to the door. Linley took the key from his pocket. It acted perfectly in drawing back the lock; but the door, when he pushed it, resisted him. He put his shoulder against it, and exerted his strength, helped by his weight. The door remained immovable.

Had one of the servants—sitting up later than usual after the party, and not aware that Mr. Linley had gone into the garden—noticed the door, and carefully fastened the

bolts on the inner side ? That was exactly what had happened.

There was nothing for it but to submit to circumstances. Linley led the way down the steps again. "We are shut out," he said.

Sydney listened in silent dismay. He seemed to be merely amused ; he treated their common misfortune as lightly as if it had been a joke.

"There's nothing so very terrible in our situation," he reminded her. "The servants' offices will be opened between six and seven o'clock ; the weather is perfect ; and the summer-house in the French Garden has one easy-chair in it, to my certain knowledge, in which you may rest and sleep. I'm sure you must be tired—let me take you there."

She drew back, and looked up at the house.

“Can’t we make them hear us?” she asked.

“Quite impossible. Besides——” He was about to remind her of the evil construction which might be placed on their appearance together, returning from the garden at an advanced hour of the night ; but her innocence pleaded with him to be silent. He only said, “You forget that we all sleep at the top of our old castle. There is no knocker to the door, and no bell that rings upstairs. Come to the summer-house. In an hour or two more we shall see the sun rise.”

She took his arm in silence. They reached the French Garden without another word having passed between them.

The summer-house had been designed, in harmony with the French taste of the last century, from a classical model. It was a rough copy in wood of The Temple of

Vesta at Rome. Opening the door for his companion, Linley paused before he followed her in. A girl brought up by a careful mother would have understood and appreciated his hesitation ; she would have concealed any little feeling of embarrassment that might have troubled her at the moment, and would have asked him to come back and let her know when the rising of the sun began. Neglected by her mother, worse than neglected by her aunt, Sydney's fearless ignorance put a question which would have lowered the poor girl cruelly in the estimation of a stranger. "Are you going to leave me here by myself?" she asked. "Why don't you come in?"

Linley thought of his visit to the school, and remembered the detestable mistress. He excused Sydney ; he felt for her. She held the door open for him. Sure of himself, he entered the summer-house.

As a mark of respect on her part, she offered the arm-chair to him : it was the one comfortable seat in the neglected place. He insisted that she should take it ; and, searching the summer-house, found a wooden stool for himself. The small circular room received but little of the dim outer light—they were near each other—they were silent. Sydney burst suddenly into a nervous little laugh.

“ Why do you laugh ? ” he asked good-humouredly

“ It seems so strange, Mr. Linley, for us to be out here.” In the moment when she made that reply her merriment vanished : she looked out sadly, through the open door, at the stillness of the night. “ What should I have done,” she wondered, “ if I had been shut out of the house by myself ? ” Her eyes rested on him timidly ; there was some thought in her which she shrank from ex-

pressing. She only said : “ I wish I knew how to be worthy of your kindness.”

Her voice warned him that she was struggling with strong emotion. In one respect, men are all alike; they hate to see a woman in tears. Linley treated her like a child; he smiled, and patted her on the shoulder. “ Nonsense!” he said gaily “ There is no merit in being kind to my good little governess.”

She took that comforting hand—it was a harmless impulse that she was unable to resist—she bent over it, and kissed it gratefully. He drew his hand away from her as if the soft touch of her lips had been fire that burnt it. “ Oh,” she cried, “ have I done wrong?”

“ No, my dear—no, no.”

There was an embarrassment in his manner, the inevitable result of his fear of himself if he faltered in the resolute exercise of

self-restraint, which was perfectly incomprehensible to Sydney. He moved his seat back a little, so as to place himself farther away. Something in that action, at that time, shocked and humiliated her. Completely misunderstanding him, she thought he was reminding her of the distance that separated them in social rank. Oh, the shame of it! the shame of it! Would other governesses have taken a liberty with their master? A fit of hysterical sobbing burst its way through her last reserves of self-control; she started to her feet, and ran out of the summer-house.

Alarmed and distressed, he followed her instantly

She was leaning against the pedestal of a statue in the garden, panting, shuddering, a sight to touch the heart of a far less sensitive man than the man who now approached her. "Sydney!" he said. "Dear little

Sydney!" She tried to speak to him in return. Breath and strength failed her together; she lifted her hand, vainly grasping at the broad pedestal behind her; she would have fallen if he had not caught her in his arms. Her head sank faintly backward on his breast. He looked at the poor little tortured face, turned up towards him in the lovely moonlight. Again and again he had honourably restrained himself—he was human; he was a man—in one mad moment it was done, hotly, passionately done—he kissed her.

For the first time in her maiden life, a man's lips touched her lips. All that had been perplexing and strange, all that had been innocently wonderful to herself in the feeling that bound Sydney to her first friend was a mystery no more. Love lifted its veil, Nature revealed its secrets, in the one supreme moment of that kiss. She threw her arms

round his neck with a low cry of delight—and returned his kiss.

“Sydney,” he whispered, “I love you.”

She heard him in rapturous silence. Her kiss had answered for her.

At that crisis in their lives, they were saved by an accident ; a poor little common accident that happens every day. The spring in the bracelet that Sydney wore gave way as she held him to her ; the bright trinket fell on the grass at their feet. The man never noticed it. The woman saw her pretty ornament as it dropped from her arm—saw, and remembered Mrs. Linley’s gift.

Cold and pale—with horror of herself confessed in the action, simple as it was—she drew back from him in dead silence.

He was astounded. In tones that trembled with agitation, he said to her: “Are you ill?”

“Shameless and wicked,” she answered. “Not ill.” She pointed to the bracelet on the grass. “Take it up; I am not fit to touch it. Look on the inner side.”

He remembered the inscription : “To Sydney Westerfield with Catherine Linley’s love.” His head sank on his breast ; he understood her at last. “You despise me,” he said; “and I deserve it.”

“No ; I despise myself. I have lived among vile people ; and I am vile like them.”

She moved away a few steps with a heavy sigh. “Kitty!” she said to herself. “Poor little Kitty!”

He followed her. “Why are you thinking of the child,” he asked, “at such a time as this?”

She replied without returning or looking round; distrust of herself had inspired her with terror of Linley, from the time

when the bracelet had dropped on the grass.

“I can make but one atonement,” she said. “We must see each other no more. I must say good-bye to Kitty—I must go. Help me to submit to my hard lot, I must go.”

He set her no example of resignation ; he shrank from the prospect that she presented to him.

“Where are you to go if you leave us ?” he asked.

“Away from England ! The farther away from *you* the better for both of us. Help me with your interest ; have me sent to the new world in the west, with other emigrants. Give me something to look forward to that is not shame and despair. Let me do something that is innocent and good—I may find a trace of my poor lost brother. Oh, let me go ! Let me go !”

Her resolution shamed him. He rose to her level, in spite of himself.

“I dare not tell you that you are wrong,” he said. “I only ask you to wait a little till we are calmer, before you speak of the future again.” He pointed to the summer-house. “Go in, my poor girl. Rest, and compose yourself, while I try to think.”

He left her, and paced up and down the formal walks in the garden. Away from the maddening fascination of her presence, his mind grew clearer. He resisted the temptation to think of her tenderly ; he set himself to consider what it would be well to do next.

The moonlight was seen no more. Misty and starless, the dark sky spread its majestic obscurity over the earth. Linley looked wearily towards the eastern heaven. The darkness daunted him ; he saw in it the shadow of his own sense of guilt. The

grey glimmering of dawn, the songs of birds when the pure light softly climbed the sky, roused and relieved him. With the first radiant rising of the sun he returned to the summer-house.

“Do I disturb you?” he asked, waiting at the door.

“No.”

“Will you come out and speak to me?”

She appeared at the door, waiting to hear what he had to say to her.

“I must ask you to submit to a sacrifice of your own feelings,” he began. “When I kept away from you in the drawing-room, last night—when my strange conduct made you fear that you had offended me—I was trying to remember what I owed to my good wife. I have been thinking of her again. We must spare her a discovery too terrible to be endured, while her attention

is claimed by the guests who are now in the house. In a week's time they will leave us. Will you consent to keep up appearances? Will you live with us as usual, until we are left by ourselves?'

"It shall be done, Mr. Linley. I only ask one favour of you. My worst enemy is my own miserable wicked heart. Oh, don't you understand me? I am ashamed to look at you!"

He had only to examine his own heart, and to know what she meant. "Say no more," he answered sadly. "We will keep as much away from each other as we can."

She shuddered at that open recognition of the guilty love which united them, in spite of their horror of it, and took refuge from him in the summer-house. Not a word more passed between them until the

unbarring of doors was heard in the stillness of the morning, and the smoke began to rise from the kitchen chimney. Then he returned, and spoke to her.

“You can get back to the house,” he said. “Go up by the front stairs, and you will not meet the servants at this early hour. If they do see you, you have your cloak on ; they will think you have been in the garden earlier than usual. As you pass the upper door, draw back the bolts quietly, and I can let myself in.”

She bent her head in silence. He looked after her as she hastened away from him over the lawn ; conscious of admiring her, conscious of more than he dared realise to himself. When she disappeared, he turned back to wait where she had been waiting. With his sense of the duty he owed to his wife penitently present to his mind, the

memory of that fatal kiss still left its vivid impression on him. “What a scoundrel I am!” he said to himself as he stood alone in the summer-house, looking at the chair which she had just left.

CHAPTER X.

KITTY MENTIONS HER BIRTHDAY.

A CLEVER old lady, possessed of the inestimable advantages of worldly experience, must submit nevertheless to the laws of Nature. Time and Sleep together—powerful agents in the small hours of the morning—had got the better of Mrs. Presty's resolution to keep awake. Free from discovery, Sydney ascended the stairs. Free from discovery, Sydney entered her own room.

Half-an-hour later, Linley opened the door of his dressing-room. His wife was still sleeping. His mother-in-law woke two

hours later; looked at her watch; and discovered that she had lost her opportunity. Other old women, under similar circumstances, might have felt discouraged. This old woman believed in her own suspicions more devoutly than ever. When the breakfast-bell rang, Sydney found Mrs. Presty in the corridor, waiting to say good-morning.

“I wonder what you were doing last night, when you ought to have been in bed?” the old lady began, with a treacherous amiability of manner. “Oh, I am not mistaken! your door was open, my dear, and I looked in.”

“Why did you look in, Mrs. Presty?”

“My young friend, I was naturally anxious about you. I am anxious still. Were you in the house? or out of the house?”

“I was walking in the garden,” Sydney replied.

“Admiring the moonlight?”

“Yes; admiring the moonlight.”

“Alone, of course?” Sydney’s friend suggested.

And Sydney took refuge in prevarication. “Why should you doubt it?” she said.

Mrs. Presty wasted no more time in asking questions. She was pleasantly reminded of the words of worldly wisdom which she had addressed to her daughter, on the day of Sydney’s arrival at Mount Morven. “The good qualities of that unfortunate young creature” (she had said) “*can not* have always resisted the horrid temptations and contaminations about her. Hundreds of times she must have had deceit forced on her; she must have lied through ungovernable fear.” Elevated a little higher than ever in her own estimation, Mrs. Presty took Sydney’s arm, and led her

down to breakfast with motherly familiarity. Linley met them at the foot of the stairs. His mother-in-law first stole a look at Sydney, and then shook hands with him cordially. "My dear Herbert, how pale you are! That horrid smoking. You look as if you had been up all night."

Mrs. Linley paid her customary visit to the schoolroom that morning.

The necessary attention to her guests had left little leisure for the exercise of observation at the breakfast-table; the one circumstance which had forced itself on her notice had been the boisterous gaiety of her husband. Too essentially honest to practise deception of any kind cleverly, Linley had overacted the part of a man whose mind was entirely at ease. The most unsuspecting woman living, his wife was simply amused. "How he does enjoy

society!" she thought. "Herbert will be a young man to the end of his life."

In the best possible spirits—still animated by her successful exertions to entertain her friends—Mrs. Linley opened the schoolroom door briskly "How are the lessons getting on?" she began—and checked herself with a start. "Kitty" she exclaimed. "Crying?"

The child ran to her mother with tears in her eyes. "Look at Syd! She sulks; she cries; she won't talk to me—send for the doctor."

"You tiresome child, I don't want the doctor. I'm not ill."

"There, Mamma!" cried Kitty "She never scolded me before to-day."

In other words, here was a complete reversal of the usual order of things in the schoolroom. Patient Sydney was out of temper; gentle Sydney spoke bitterly to

the little friend whom she loved. Mrs. Linley drew a chair to the governess's side, and took her hand. The strangely altered girl tore her hand away, and burst into a violent fit of crying. Puzzled and frightened, Kitty (to the best of a child's ability) followed her example. Mrs. Linley took her daughter on her knee, and gave Sydney's outbreak of agitation time to subside. There were no feverish appearances in her face, there was no feverish heat in her skin when their hands had touched each other for a moment. In all probability the mischief was nervous mischief, and the outburst of weeping was an hysterical effort at relief.

"I am afraid, my dear, you have had a bad night," Mrs. Linley said.

"Bad? Worse than bad!"

Sydney stopped; looked at her good mistress and friend in terror; and made a

confused effort to explain away what she had just said. As sensibly and kindly self-possessed as ever, Mrs. Linley told her that she only wanted rest and quiet. "Let me take you to my room," she proposed. "We will have the sofa moved into the balcony; and you will soon go to sleep in the delicious warm air. You may put away your books, Kitty; this is a holiday. Come with me, and be petted and spoilt by the ladies in the morning-room."

Neither the governess nor the pupil was worthy of the sympathy so frankly offered to them. Still strangely confused, Sydney made commonplace apologies, and asked leave to go out and walk in the park. Hearing this, Kitty declared that where her governess went she would go too. Mrs. Linley smoothed her daughter's pretty auburn hair, and said playfully: "I think I ought to be jealous." To her surprise

Sydney looked up as if the words had been addressed to herself. "You mustn't be fonder, my dear, of your governess," Mrs. Linley went on, "than you are of your mother." She kissed the child, and, rising to go, discovered that Sydney had moved to another part of the room. She was standing at the piano, with a page of music in her hand. The page was upside down—and she had placed herself in a position which concealed her face. Slow as Mrs. Linley was to doubt any person (more especially a person who interested her) she left the room with a vague fear of something wrong, and with a conviction that she would do well to consult her husband.

Hearing the door close, Sydney looked round. She and Kitty were alone again ; and Kitty was putting away her books, without showing any pleasure at the prospect of a holiday.

Sydney took the child fondly in her arms. "Would you be very sorry," she asked, "if I was obliged to go away, some day, and leave you?" Kitty turned pale with terror at the dreadful prospect which those words presented. "There! there! I am only joking," Sydney said, shocked at the effect which her attempt to suggest the impending separation had produced. "You shall come with me, darling; we will walk in the park together."

Kitty's face brightened directly. She proposed extending their walk to the paddock, and feeding the cows. Sydney readily consented. Any amusement was welcome to her which diverted the child's attention from herself.

They had been nearly an hour in the park, and were returning to the house through a clump of trees, when Sydney's companion, running on before her, cried,

“Here’s Papa!” Her first impulse was to draw back behind a tree, in the hope of escaping notice. Linley sent Kitty away to gather a nosegay of daisies, and joined Sydney under the trees.

“I have been looking for you everywhere,” he said. “My wife——”

Sydney interrupted him. “Discovered!” she exclaimed.

“There is nothing that need alarm you,” he replied. “Catherine is too good and too true herself to suspect others easily. She sees a change in you that she doesn’t understand—she asks if I have noticed it—and that is all. But her mother has the cunning of the devil. There is a serious reason for controlling yourself.”

He spoke so earnestly that he startled her. “Are you angry with me?” she asked.

“Angry! Does the man live who could be angry with you?”

“It might be better for both of us if you *were* angry with me. I have tried to control myself; I will try again. Oh, if you only knew what I suffer when Mrs. Linley is kind to me!”

He persisted in trying to rouse her to a sense of the danger that threatened them, while the visitors remained in the house. “In a few days, Sydney, there will be no more need for the deceit that is now forced on us. Till that time comes, remember—Mrs. Presty suspects us.”

Kitty ran back to them with her hands full of daisies before they could say more.

“There is your nosegay, Papa. No; I don’t want you to thank me—I want to know what present you are going to give me.” Her father’s mind was pre-occupied; he looked at her absently. The child’s sense of her own importance was wounded: she appealed to her governess. “Would

you believe it?" she asked. "Papa has forgotten that next Tuesday is my birthday!"

"Very well, Kitty; I must pay the penalty of forgetting. What present would you like to have?"

"I want a doll's perambulator."

"Ha! In my time we were satisfied with a doll."

They all three looked round. Another person had suddenly joined in the talk. There was no mistaking the person's voice: Mrs. Presty appeared among the trees, taking a walk in the park. Had she heard what Linley and the governess had said to each other while Kitty was gathering daisies?

"Quite a domestic scene!" the sly old lady remarked. "Papa, looking like a saint in a picture, with flowers in his hand. Papa's spoilt child always wanting some-

thing, and always getting it. And Papa's governess, so sweetly fresh and pretty that I should certainly fall in love with her, if I had the advantage of being a man. You have no doubt remarked, Herbert—I think I hear the bell ; shall we go to lunch?—you have no doubt, I say, remarked what curiously opposite styles Catherine and Miss Westerfield present ; so charming, and yet such complete contrasts. I wonder whether they occasionally envy each other's good looks ? Does my daughter ever regret that she is not Miss Westerfield ? And do you, my dear, sometimes wish you were Mrs. Linley ?”

“ While we are about it, let me put a third question,” Linley interposed. “ Are you ever aware of it yourself, Mrs. Presty, when you are talking nonsense ?”

He was angry, and he showed it in that feeble reply Sydney felt the implied

insult offered to her in another way. It roused her to the exercise of self-control as nothing had roused her yet. She ignored Mrs. Presty's irony with a composure worthy of Mrs. Presty herself. "Where is the woman," she said, "who would *not* wish to be as beautiful as Mrs. Linley—and as good?"

"Thank you, my dear, for a compliment to my daughter: a sincere compliment, no doubt. It comes in very neatly and nicely," Mrs. Presty acknowledged, "after my son-in-law's little outbreak of temper. My poor Herbert, when will you understand that I mean no harm? I am an essentially humorous person; my wonderful spirits are always carrying me away. I do assure you, Miss Westerfield, I don't know what worry is. My troubles—deaths in the family, and that sort of thing—seem to slip off me in a most remarkable manner. Poor

Mr. Norman used to attribute it to my excellent appetite. Or, no; I think he said my excellent digestion. My second husband would never hear of such an explanation as that. His high ideal of women shrank from allusions to stomachs. He used to speak so nicely (quoting some poet) of the sunshine of my breast. Vague perhaps," said Mrs. Presty, modestly looking down at the ample prospect of a personal nature which presented itself below her throat, "but so flattering to one's feelings. There's the luncheon bell again, I declare! I'll run on before and tell them you are coming. Some people might say they wished to be punctual. I am truth itself, and I own I don't like being helped to the underside of the fish. *Au revoir!* Do you remember, Miss Westerfield, when I asked you to repeat *au revoir* as a specimen of your French? I didn't think much

of your accent. Oh, dear me, I didn't think much of your accent."

Kitty looked after her fluent grandmother with eyes that stared respectfully in ignorant admiration. She pulled her father's coat tail, and addressed herself gravely to his private ear. "Oh, Papa, what noble words Grandmamma has!"

CHAPTER XI.

LINLEY ASSERTS HIS AUTHORITY.

ON the evening of Monday in the new week, the last of the visitors had left Mount Morven. Mrs. Linley dropped into a chair (in, what Randal called, “the heavenly tranquillity of the deserted drawing-room”) and owned that the effort of entertaining her guests had completely worn her out. “It’s too absurd, at my time of life,” she said with a faint smile; “but I am really and truly so tired that I must go to bed before dark, as if I was a child again.”

Mrs. Presty—maliciously observant of the governess, sitting silent and apart in a

corner—approached her daughter in a hurry; to all appearance with a special object in view. Linley was at no loss to guess what that object might be. “Will you do me a favour, Catherine?” Mrs. Presty began. “I wish to say a word to you in your own room.”

“Oh, Mamma, have some mercy on me, and put it off till to-morrow!”

Mrs. Presty reluctantly consented to this proposal, on one condition. “It is understood,” she stipulated, “that I am to see you the first thing in the morning?”

Mrs. Linley was ready to accept that condition, or any condition, which promised her a night of uninterrupted repose. She crossed the room to her husband, and took his arm. “In my state of fatigue, Herbert, I shall never get up our steep stairs, unless you help me.”

As they ascended the stairs together,

Linley found that his wife had a reason of her own for leaving the drawing-room.

“I am quite weary enough to go to bed,” she explained. “But I wanted to speak to you first. It’s about Miss Westerfield. (No, no, we needn’t stop on the landing.) Do you know, I think I have found out what has altered our little governess so strangely—I seem to startle you?”

“No.”

“I am only astonished,” Mrs. Linley resumed, “at my own stupidity in not having discovered it before. We must be kinder than ever to the poor girl now; can’t you guess why? My dear, how dull you are! Must I remind you that we have had two single men among our visitors. One of them is old, and doesn’t matter. But the other—I mean Sir George, of course—is young, handsome, and agreeable. I am so sorry for Sydney Westerfield. It’s

plain to me that she is hopelessly in love with a man who has run through his fortune, and must marry money if he marries at all. I shall speak to Sydney to-morrow; and I hope and trust I shall succeed in winning her confidence. Thank Heaven, here we are at my door at last! I can't say more now; I'm ready to drop. Good night, dear; you look tired too. It's a nice thing to have friends, I know; but, oh, what a relief it is sometimes to get rid of them!"

She kissed him, and let him go.

Left by himself, to compare his wife's innocent mistake with the terrible enlightenment that awaited her, Linley's courage failed him. He leaned on the quaintly-carved rail that protected the outer side of the landing, and looked down at the stone hall far below. If the old woodwork (he thought) would only give way under his

weight, there would be an escape from the coming catastrophe, found in an instant.

A timely remembrance of Sydney recalled him to himself. For her sake, he was bound to prevent Mrs. Presty's contemplated interview with his wife, on the next morning.

Descending the stairs, he met his brother in the corridor on the first floor.

"The very man I wanted to see," Randal said. "Tell me, Herbert, what is the matter with that curious old woman?"

"Do you mean Mrs. Presty?"

"Yes. She has just been telling me that our friend Mrs. MacEdwin has taken a fancy to Miss Westerfield, and would be only too glad to deprive us of our pretty governess."

"Did Mrs. Presty say that in Miss Westerfield's presence?"

"No. Soon after you and Catherine left the room, Miss Westerfield left it too. I

dare say I am wrong, for I haven't had time to think of it; but Mrs. Presty's manner suggested to me that she would be glad to see the poor girl sent out of the house."

"I am going to speak to her, Randal, on that very subject. Is she still in the drawing-room?"

"Yes."

"Did she say anything more to you?"

"I didn't give her the chance; I don't like Mrs. Presty. You look worn and worried, Herbert. Is there anything wrong?"

"If there is, my dear fellow, you will hear of it to-morrow."

So they parted.

Comfortably established in the drawing-room, Mrs. Presty had just opened her favourite newspaper. Her only companion was Linley's black poodle, resting at her feet. On the opening of the door, the dog

rose—advanced to caress his master—and looked up in Linley's face. If Mrs. Presty's attention had happened to be turned that way, she might have seen, in the faithful creature's sudden and silent retreat, a warning of her son-in-law's humour at that moment. But she was, or assumed to be, interested in her reading; and she deliberately over-looked Linley's appearance. After waiting a little to attract her attention, he quietly took the newspaper out of her hand.

“What does this mean?” Mrs. Presty asked.

“It means, ma'am, that I have something to say to you.”

“Apparently, something that can't be said with common civility? Be as rude as you please: I am well used to it.”

Linley wisely took no notice of this.

“Since you have lived at Mount Morven,”

he proceeded, "I think you have found me, on the whole, an easy man to get on with. At the same time, when I do make up my mind to be master in my own house, I *am* master."

Mrs. Presty crossed her hands placidly on her lap, and asked: "Master of what?"

"Master of your suspicions of Miss Westerfield. You are free, of course, to think of her and of me as you please. What I forbid is the expression of your thoughts—either by way of hints to my brother, or officious communications with my wife. Don't suppose that I am afraid of the truth. Mrs. Linley shall know more than you think for, and shall know it to-morrow; not from you, but from me."

Mrs. Presty shook her head compassionately. "My good sir, surely you know me too well to think that I am to be disposed of in that easy way? Must I remind you

that your wife's mother has 'the cunning of the devil'?"

Linley recognised his own words. "So you were listening among the trees!" he said.

"Yes; I was listening; and I have only to regret that I didn't hear more. Let us return to our subject. I don't trust my daughter's interests — my much-injured daughter's interests—in your hands. They are not clean hands, Mr. Linley. I have a duty to do; and I shall do it to-morrow."

"No, Mrs. Presty, you won't do it to-morrow "

"Who will prevent me?"

"I shall prevent you."

"In what way, if you please?"

"I don't think it necessary to answer that question. My servants will have their instructions; and I shall see myself that my orders are obeyed."

“Thank you. I begin to understand; I am to be turned out of the house. Very well. We shall see what my daughter says to that.”

“You know as well as I do, Mrs. Presty, that if your daughter is forced to choose between us she will decide for her husband. You have the night before you for consideration. I have no more to say”

Among Mrs. Presty’s merits, it is only just to reckon a capacity for making up her mind rapidly, under stress of circumstances. Before Linley had opened the door, on his way out, he was called back.

“I am shocked to trouble you again,” Mrs. Presty said, “but I don’t propose to interfere with my night’s rest by thinking about *you*. My position is perfectly clear to me, without wasting time in consideration. When a man so completely forgets what is due to the weaker sex as to threaten

a woman, the woman has no alternative but to submit. You are aware that I had arranged to see my daughter to-morrow morning. I yield to brute force, sir. Tell your wife that I shall not keep my appointment. Are you satisfied?"

"Quite satisfied," Linley said—and left the room.

His mother-in-law looked after him with a familiar expression of opinion, and a smile of supreme contempt.

"You fool!"

Only two words; and yet there seemed to be some hidden meaning in them—relating perhaps to what might happen on the next day—which gently tickled Mrs. Presty in the region assigned by phrenologists to the sense of self-esteem.

CHAPTER XII.

TWO OF THEM SLEEP BADLY.

WAITING for Sydney to come into the bedroom as usual and wish her good-night, Kitty was astonished by the appearance of her grandmother, entering on tiptoe from the corridor, with a small paper parcel in her hand.

“Whisper!” said Mrs. Presty, pointing to the open door of communication with Mrs. Linley’s room. “This is your birthday present. You mustn’t look at it till you wake to-morrow morning.” She pushed the parcel under the pillow—and, instead of saying good-night, took a chair and sat down.

“May I show my present,” Kitty asked, “when I go to Mamma in the morning?”

The present hidden under the paper wrapper was a sixpenny picture-book. Kitty’s grandmother disapproved of spending money lavishly on birthday gifts to children. “Show it, of course; and take the greatest care of it,” Mrs. Presty answered gravely “But tell me one thing, my dear, wouldn’t you like to see all your presents early in the morning, like mine?”

Still smarting under the recollection of her interview with her son-in-law, Mrs. Presty had certain ends to gain in putting this idea into the child’s head. It was her special object to raise domestic obstacles to a private interview between the husband and wife, during the earlier hours of the day. If the gifts, usually presented after the nursery dinner, were produced on this

occasion after breakfast, there would be a period of delay before any confidential conversation could take place between Mr. and Mrs. Linley. In this interval Mrs. Presty saw her opportunity of setting Linley's authority at defiance, by rousing the first jealous suspicion in the mind of his wife.

Innocent little Kitty became her grandmother's accomplice on the spot. "I shall ask Mamma to let me have my presents at breakfast-time," she announced.

"And kind Mamma will say Yes," Mrs. Presty chimed in. "We will breakfast early, my precious child. Good-night."

Kitty was half asleep when her governess entered the room afterwards, much later than usual. "I thought you had forgotten me," she said, yawning, and stretching out her plump little arms.

Sydney's heart ached when she thought of the separation that was to come with the

next day; her despair forced its way to expression in words. "I wish I could forget you," she answered, in reckless wretchedness.

The child was still too drowsy to hear plainly. "What did you say?" she asked. Sydney gently lifted her in the bed, and kissed her again and again. Kitty's sleepy eyes opened in surprise. "How cold your hands are!" she said; "and how often you kiss me. I am going to make a joke, Syd. Which is it you have come to say to me—good-night or good-bye?"

Sydney laid her down again on the pillow, gave her a last kiss, and ran out of the room.

In the corridor she heard Linley's voice on the lower floor. He was asking one of the servants if Miss Westerfield was in the house or in the garden. Her first impulse was to advance to the stairs and to answer

his question. In a moment more the remembrance of Mrs. Linley checked her. She went back to her bedchamber.

The presents that she had received, since her arrival at Mount Morven, were all laid out so that they could be easily seen by any person entering the room, after she had left the house. On the sofa lay the pretty new dress which she had worn at the evening party. Other little gifts were arranged on either side of it. The bracelet, resting on the pedestal of a statue close by, kept a morsel of paper in its place—on which she had written a few penitent words of farewell addressed to Mrs. Linley. On the toilet-table three photographic portraits showed themselves among the brushes and combs. She sat down, and looked first at the likenesses of Mrs. Linley and Kitty.

Had she any right to make those dear faces her companions in the future?

She hesitated ; her tears dropped on the photographs. “ They’re as good as spoilt now,” she thought ; “ they’re no longer fit for anybody but me.” She paused, and abruptly took up the third and last photograph—the likeness of Herbert Linley.

Was it an offence, now, even to look at his portrait? No idea of leaving it behind her was in her mind. Her resolution vibrated between two miseries—the misery of preserving her keepsake after she had parted from him for ever, and the misery of destroying it. Resigned to one more sacrifice, she took the card in both hands to tear it up. It would have been scattered in pieces on the floor, but for the chance which had turned the portrait side of the card towards her instead of the back. Her longing eyes stole a last look at him—a frenzy seized her—she pressed her lips to the photograph in a passion of hopeless love. “ What

does it matter?" she asked herself. "I'm nothing but the ignorant object of his kindness—the poor fool who could see no difference between gratitude and love. Where is the harm of having him with me when I am starving in the streets, or dying in the workhouse?" The fervid spirit in her that had never known a mother's loving discipline, never thrilled to the sympathy of a sister-friend, rose in revolt against the evil destiny which had embittered her life. Her eyes still rested on the photograph. "Come to my heart, my only friend, and kill me!" As those wild words escaped her, she thrust the card furiously into the bosom of her dress—and threw herself on the floor. There was something in the mad self-abandonment of that action, which mocked the innocent despair of her childhood, on the day when her mother left her at the cruel mercy of her aunt.

That night was a night of torment in secret to another person at Mount Morven.

Wandering, in his need of self-isolation, up and down the dreary stone passages in the lower part of the house, Linley counted the hours, inexorably lessening the interval between him and the ordeal of confession to his wife. As yet, he had failed to find the opportunity of addressing to Sydney the only words of encouragement he could allow to pass his lips: he had asked for her earlier in the evening, and nobody could tell him where she was. Still in ignorance of the refuge which she might by bare possibility hope to find in Mrs. MacEdwin's house, Sydney was spared the torturing doubts which now beset Herbert Linley's mind. Would the noble woman whom they had injured allow their atonement to plead for them, and consent to keep their miserable secret? Might they still put their

trust in that generous nature a few hours hence? Again and again those questions confronted Linley; and again and again he shrank from attempting to answer them.

CHAPTER XIII.

KITTY KEEPS HER BIRTHDAY.

THEY were all assembled as usual at the breakfast-table.

Preferring the request suggested to her by Mrs. Presty, Kitty had hastened the presentation of the birthday gifts, by getting into her mother's bed in the morning, and exacting her mother's promise before she would consent to get out again. By her own express wish, she was left in ignorance of what the presents would prove to be. "Hide them from me," said this young epicure in pleasurable sensations, "and make me want to see them until I can bear it no longer."

The gifts had accordingly been collected in an embrasure of one of the windows; and the time had now arrived when Kitty could bear it no longer.

In the procession of the presents, Mrs. Linley led the way.

She had passed behind the screen which had thus far protected the hidden treasures from discovery, and appeared again with a vision of beauty in the shape of a doll. The dress of this wonderful creature exhibited the latest audacities of French fashion. Her head made a bow; her eyes went to sleep and woke again; she had a voice that said two words—more precious than two thousand in the mouth of a mere living creature. Kitty's arms opened and embraced her gift with a scream of ecstasy. That fervent pressure found its way to the right spring. The doll squeaked: "Mamma!"—and creaked—and cried again—and said: "Papa!"

Kitty sat down on the floor; her legs would support her no longer. "I think I shall faint," she said quite seriously.

In the midst of the general laughter, Sydney silently placed a new toy (a pretty little imitation of a jeweller's casket) at Kitty's side, and drew back before the child could look at her. Mrs. Presty was the only person present who noticed her pale face and the trembling of her hands as she made the effort which preserved her composure.

The doll's necklace, bracelets, and watch and chain, riveted Kitty's attention on the casket. Just as she thought of looking round for her dear Syd, her father produced a new outburst of delight by presenting a perambulator worthy of the doll. Her uncle followed with a parasol, devoted to the preservation of the doll's complexion when she went out for an airing. Then there came a pause. Where was the generous grand-

mother's gift? Nobody remembered it; Mrs. Presty herself discovered the inestimable sixpenny picture-book cast away and forgotten on a distant window-seat. "I have a great mind to keep this," she said to Kitty, "till you are old enough to value it properly." In the moment of her absence at the window, Linley's mother-in-law lost the chance of seeing him whisper to Sydney. "Meet me in the shrubbery in half-an-hour," he said. She stepped back from him, startled by the proposal. When Mrs. Presty was in the middle of the room again, Linley and the governess were no longer near each other.

Having by this time recovered herself, Kitty got on her legs. "Now," the spoilt child declared, addressing the company present, "I'm going to play."

The doll was put into the perambulator, and was wheeled about the room, while Mrs.

Linley moved the chairs out of the way, and Randal attended with the open parasol—under orders to “pretend that the sun was shining.” Once more the sixpenny picture-book was neglected. Mrs. Presty picked it up from the floor, determined by this time to hold it in reserve until her ungrateful grandchild reached years of discretion. She put it in the book-case between Byron’s “Don Juan” and Butler’s “Lives of the Saints.” In the position which she now occupied, Linley was visible approaching Sydney again. “Your own interests are seriously concerned,” he whispered, “in something that I have to tell you.”

Incapable of hearing what passed between them, Mrs. Presty could see that a secret understanding united her son-in-law and the governess. She looked round cautiously at Mrs. Linley

Kitty’s humour had changed; she was

now eager to see the doll's splendid clothes taken off and put on again. "Come and look at it," she said to Sydney; "I want you to enjoy my birthday as much as I do." Left by himself, Randal got rid of the parasol by putting it on a table near the door. Mrs. Presty beckoned to him to join her at the farther end of the room.

"I want you to do me a favour," she began.

Glancing at Linley before she proceeded, Mrs. Presty took up a newspaper, and affected to be consulting Randal's opinion on a passage which had attracted her attention. "Your brother is looking our way," she whispered: "he mustn't suspect that there is a secret between us."

False pretences of any kind invariably irritated Randal. "What do you want me to do?" he asked sharply.

The reply only increased his perplexity.

“Observe Miss Westerfield and your brother. Look at them now ”

Randal obeyed. “What is there to look at?” he inquired.

“Can’t you see?”

“I see they are talking to each other.”

“They are talking confidentially; talking so that Mrs. Linley can’t hear them. Look again.”

Randal fixed his eyes on Mrs. Presty, with an expression which showed his dislike of that lady a little too plainly. Before he could answer what she had just said to him, his lively little niece hit on a new idea. The sun was shining, the flowers were in their brightest beauty—and the doll had not yet been taken into the garden! Kitty at once led the way out; so completely pre-occupied in steering the perambulator in a straight course that she forgot her uncle and the parasol. Only

waiting to remind her husband and Sydney that they were wasting the beautiful morning indoors, Mrs. Linley followed her daughter—and innocently placed a fatal obstacle in Mrs. Presty's way by leaving the room. Having consulted each other by a look, Linley and the governess went out next. Left alone with Randal, Mrs. Presty's anger, under the complete overthrow of her carefully-laid scheme, set restraint at defiance.

“My daughter's married life is a wreck,” she burst out, pointing theatrically to the door by which Linley and Sydney Westfield had retired. “And Catherine has the vile creature whom your brother picked up in London to thank for it! Now do you understand me?”

“Less than ever,” Randal answered—
“unless you have taken leave of your senses.”

Mrs. Presty recovered the command of her temper.

On that fine morning her daughter might remain in the garden until the luncheon-bell rang. Linley had only to say that he wished to speak with his wife; and the private interview, which he had so rudely insisted on as his sole privilege, would assuredly take place. The one chance left of still defeating him on his own ground was to force Randal to interfere by convincing him of his brother's guilt. Moderation of language and composure of manner offered the only hopeful prospect of reaching this end. Mrs. Presty assumed the disguise of patient submission, and used the irresistible influence of good humour and good sense.

“I don't complain, dear Randal, of what you have said of me,” she replied. “My indiscretion has deserved it. I ought to

have produced my proofs, and have left it to you to draw the conclusion. Sit down, if you please. I won't detain you for more than a few minutes."

Randal had not anticipated such moderation as this; he took the chair that was nearest to Mrs. Presty. They were both now sitting with their backs turned to the entrance from the library to the drawing-room.

"I won't trouble you with my own impressions," Mrs. Presty went on. "I will be careful only to mention what I have seen and heard. If you refuse to believe me I refer you to the guilty persons themselves."

She had just got to the end of those introductory words, when Mrs. Linley returned, by way of the library, to fetch the forgotten parasol.

Randal insisted on making Mrs. Presty

express herself plainly. "You speak of guilty persons," he said. "Am I to understand that one of those guilty persons is my brother?"

Mrs. Linley advanced a step and took the parasol from the table. Hearing what Randal said, she paused, wondering at the strange allusion to her husband. In the meanwhile, Mrs. Presty answered the question that had been addressed to her.

"Yes," she said to Randal; "I mean your brother, and your brother's mistress—Sydney Westerfield."

Mrs. Linley laid the parasol back on the table, and approached them.

She never once looked at her mother; her face, white and rigid, was turned towards Randal. To him, and to him only, she spoke.

"What does my mother's horrible language mean?" she asked.

Mrs. Presty triumphed inwardly ; chance had decided in her favour after all ! “Don’t you see,” she said to her daughter, “that I am here to answer for myself?”

Mrs. Linley still looked at Randal, and still spoke to him. “It is impossible for me to insist on an explanation from my mother,” she proceeded. “No matter what I may feel, I must remember that she *is* my mother. I ask you again—you who have been listening to her—what does she mean?”

Mrs. Presty’s sense of her own importance refused to submit to being passed over in this way.

“However insolently you may behave, Catherine, you will not succeed in provoking me. Your mother is bound to open your eyes to the truth. You have a rival in your husband’s affections ; and that rival is your governess. Take your

own course now ; I have no more to say." With her head high in the air—looking the picture of conscious virtue—the old lady walked out.

At the same moment, Randal seized his first opportunity of speaking.

He addressed himself gently and respectfully to his sister-in-law. She refused to hear him. The indignation which Mrs. Presty had roused in her made no allowances, and was blind to all sense of right.

"Don't trouble yourself to account for your silence," she said most unjustly. "You were listening to my mother without a word of remonstrance when I came into the room. You are concerned in this vile slander, too."

Randal considerably refrained from provoking her by attempting to defend himself, while she was incapable of understanding him. "You will be sorry when you find

that you have misjudged me," he said, and sighed, and left her.

She dropped into a chair. If there was any one distinct thought in her at that moment, it was the thought of her husband. She was eager to see him ; she longed to say to him : " My love, I don't believe a word of it!" He was not in the garden when she had returned for the parasol ; and Sydney was not in the garden. Wondering what had become of her father and her governess, Kitty had asked the nursemaid to look for them. What had happened since? Where had they been found? After some hesitation, Mrs. Linley sent for the nursemaid. She felt the strongest reluctance, when the girl appeared, to approach the very inquiries which she was interested in making.

" Have you found Mr. Linley?" she said —with an effort.

“ Yes, ma’am.”

“ Where did you find him?”

“ In the shrubbery.”

“ Did your master say anything?”

“ I slipped away, ma’am, before he saw me.”

“ Why?”

“ Miss Westerfield was in the shrubbery, with my master. I might have been mistaken——” The girl paused, and looked confused.

Mrs. Linley tried to tell her to go on. The words were in her mind ; but the capacity of giving expression to them failed her. She impatiently made a sign. The sign was understood.

“ I might have been mistaken,” the maid repeated——“ but I thought Miss Westerfield was crying.”

Having replied in those terms, she seemed to be anxious to get away. The

parasol caught her eye. "Miss Kitty wants this," she said, "and wonders why you have not gone back to her in the garden. May I take the parasol?"

"Take it."

The tone of the mistress's voice was completely changed. The servant looked at her with vague misgivings. "Are you not well, ma'am?"

"Quite well."

The servant withdrew.

Mrs. Linley's chair happened to be near one of the windows, which commanded a view of the drive leading to the main entrance of the house. A carriage had just arrived, bringing holiday travellers to visit that part of Mount Morven which was open to strangers. She watched them as they got out, talking, and laughing, and looking about them. Still shrinking instinctively from the first doubt of Herbert

that had ever entered her mind, she found a refuge from herself in watching the ordinary events of the day. One by one the tourists disappeared under the portico of the front door. The empty carriage was driven away next, to water the horses at the village inn. Solitude was all she could see from the window ; silence, horrible silence, surrounded her out of doors and in. The thoughts from which she recoiled forced their way back into her mind; the narrative of the nursemaid's discovery became a burden on her memory once more. She considered the circumstances. In spite of herself, she considered the circumstances again. Her husband and Sydney Westerfield together in the shrubbery—and Sydney crying. Had Mrs. Presty's abominable suspicion of them reached their ears? or?—No! that second possibility might be estimated at its right value by any

other woman ; not by Herbert Linley's wife.

She snatched up the newspaper, and fixed her eyes on it in the hope of fixing her mind on it next. Obstinate, desperately, she read without knowing what she was reading. The lines of print were beginning to mingle and grow dim, when she was startled by the sudden opening of the door. She looked round.

Her husband entered the room.

CHAPTER XIV

KITTY FEELS THE HEARTACHE.

LINLEY advanced a few steps—and stopped.

His wife, hurrying eagerly to meet him, checked herself. It might have been distrust, or it might have been unreasoning fear—she hesitated on the point of approaching him.

“I have something to say, Catherine, which I’m afraid will distress you.”

His voice faltered, his eyes rested on her—then looked away again. He said no more.

He had spoken a few commonplace words—and yet he had said enough. She

saw the truth in his eyes, heard the truth in his voice. A fit of trembling seized her. Linley stepped forward, in the fear that she might fall. She instantly controlled herself, and signed to him to keep back. "Don't touch me!" she said. "You come from Miss Westerfield!"

That reproach roused him.

"I own that I come from Miss Westerfield," he answered. "She addresses a request to you through me."

"I refuse to grant it."

"Hear it first."

"No!"

"Hear it—in your own interest. She asks permission to leave the house, never to return again. While she is still innocent——"

His wife eyed him with a look of unutterable contempt. He submitted to it, but not in silence.

“A man doesn’t lie, Catherine, who makes such a confession as I am making now. Miss Westerfield offers the one atonement in her power, while she is still innocent of having wronged you—except in thought.”

“Is that all?” Mrs. Linley asked.

“It rests with you,” he replied, “to say if there is any other sacrifice of herself which will be more acceptable to you.”

“Let me understand first what the sacrifice means. Does Miss Westerfield make any conditions?”

“She has positively forbidden me to make conditions.”

“And goes out into the world, helpless and friendless?”

“Yes.”

Even under the terrible trial that wrung her, the nobility of the woman’s nature spoke in her next words.

“Give me time to think of what you have said,” she pleaded. “I have led a happy life ; I am not used to suffer as I am suffering now ”

They were both silent. Kitty’s voice was audible on the stairs that led to the picture-gallery, disputing with the maid. Neither her father nor her mother heard her.

“Miss Westerfield is innocent of having wronged me, except in thought,” Mrs. Linley resumed. “Do you tell me that on your word of honour?”

“On my word of honour.”

So far his wife was satisfied. “My governess,” she said, “might have deceived me—she has not deceived me. I owe it to her to remember that. She shall go, but not helpless and not friendless.”

Her husband forgot the restraints he had imposed on himself.

“Is there another woman in the world like you!” he exclaimed.

“Many other women,” she answered firmly. “A vulgar termagant, feeling a sense of injury, finds relief in an outburst of jealousy and a furious quarrel. You have always lived among ladies. Surely you ought to know that a wife in my position, who respects herself, restrains herself. I try to remember what I owe to others as well as what they owe to me.”

She approached the writing-table, and took up a pen.

Feeling his position acutely, Linley refrained from openly admiring her generosity. Until he had deserved to be forgiven, he had forfeited the right to express an opinion on her conduct. She misinterpreted his silence. As she understood it, he appreciated an act of self-

sacrifice on Miss Westerfield's side—but he had no word of encouragement for an act of self-sacrifice on his wife's side. She threw down the pen, with the first outbreak of anger that had escaped her yet.

“You have spoken for the governess,” she said to him. “I haven't heard yet, sir, what you have to say for yourself. Is it you who tempted her? You know how gratefully she feels towards you—have you perverted her gratitude, and led her blindfold to love? Cruel, cruel, cruel! Defend yourself if you can.”

He made no reply.

“Is it not worth your while to defend yourself?” she burst out passionately. “Your silence is an insult!”

“My silence is a confession,” he answered sadly. “*She* may accept your mercy — I may not even hope for it.”

Something in the tone of his voice reminded her of past days—the days of perfect love and perfect confidence, when she had been the one woman in the world to him. Dearly treasured remembrances of her married life filled her heart with tenderness, and dimmed with tears the angry light that had risen in her eyes. There was no pride, no anger, in his wife when she spoke to him now.

“Oh, my husband, has she taken your love from me?”

“Judge for yourself, Catherine, if there is no proof of my love for you in what I have resisted—and no remembrance of all that I owe to you in what I have confessed.”

She ventured a little nearer to him.

“Can I believe you?”

“Put me to the test.”

She instantly took him at his word.

“When Miss Westerfield has left us, promise not to see her again.”

“I promise.”

“And not even to write to her.”

“I promise.”

She went back to the writing-table. “My heart is easier,” she said simply. “I can be merciful to her now.”

After writing a few lines, she rose, and handed the paper to him. He looked up from it in surprise. “Addressed to Mrs. MacEdwin!” he said.

“Addressed,” she answered, “to the only person I know who feels a true interest in Miss Westerfield. Have you not heard of it?”

“I remember,” he said—and read the lines that followed:

“I recommend Miss Westerfield as a teacher of young children, having had ample

proof of her capacity, industry, and good temper while she has been governess to my child. She leaves her situation in my service, under circumstances which testify to her sense of duty and her sense of gratitude."

"Have I said," she asked, "more than I could honourably and truly say—even after what has happened?"

He could only look at her; no words could have spoken for him as his silence spoke for him at that moment. When she took back the written paper there was pardon in her eyes already.

The last worst trial remained to be undergone; she faced it resolutely. "Tell Miss Westerfield that I wish to see her."

On the point of leaving the room, Herbert was called back. "If you happen to meet

with my mother," his wife added, "will you ask her to come to me?"

Mrs. Presty knew her daughter's nature ; Mrs. Presty had been waiting near at hand, in expectation of the message which she now received.

Tenderly and respectfully, Mrs. Linley addressed herself to her mother. "When we last met, I thought you spoke rashly and cruelly. I know now that there was truth—*some* truth, let me say—in what offended me at the time. If you felt strongly, it was for my sake. I wish to beg your pardon ; I was hasty, I was wrong."

On an occasion when she had first irritated and then surprised him, Randal Linley had said to Mrs. Presty, "You have got a heart, after all!" Her reply to her daughter showed that view of her character to be the right one. "Say no more, my

dear," she answered. "*I* was hasty; *I* was wrong."

The words had barely fallen from her lips, before Herbert returned. He was followed by Sydney Westerfield.

The governess stopped in the middle of the room. Her head sank on her breast; her quick convulsive breathing was the only sound that broke the silence. Mrs. Linley advanced to the place in which Sydney stood. There was something divine in her beauty as she looked at the shrinking girl, and held out her hand.

Sydney fell on her knees. In silence she lifted that generous hand to her lips. In silence, Mrs. Linley raised her—took the writing which testified to her character from the table—and presented it. Linley looked at his wife, looked at the governess. He waited—and still neither the one nor the other uttered a word. It was more

than he could endure. He addressed himself to Sydney first.

“Try to thank Mrs. Linley,” he said.

She answered faintly : “I can’t speak!”

He appealed to his wife next. “Say a last kind word to her,” he pleaded.

She made an effort, a vain effort to obey him. A gesture of despair answered for her as Sydney had answered : “I can’t speak!”

True, nobly true, to the Christian virtue that repents, to the Christian virtue that forgives, those three persons stood together on the brink of separation, and forced their frail humanity to suffer and submit.

In mercy to the women, Linley summoned the courage to part them. He turned to his wife first.

“I may say, Catherine, that she has your good wishes for happier days to come?”

Mrs. Linley pressed his hand.

He approached Sydney, and gave his

wife's message. It was in his heart to add something equally kind on his own part. He could only say what we have all said—how sincerely, how sorrowfully, we all know—the common word, “Good-bye!”—the common wish, “God bless you!”

At that last moment the child ran into the room, in search of her mother.

There was a low murmur of horror at the sight of her. That innocent heart, they had all hoped, might have been spared the misery of the parting scene!

She saw that Sydney had her hat and cloak on. “You're dressed to go out,” she said. Sydney turned away to hide her face. It was too late; Kitty had seen the tears. “Oh, my darling, you're not going away!” She looked at her father and mother. “Is she going away?” They were afraid to answer her. With all her little strength, she clasped her beloved friend and play-

fellow round the waist. “My own dear, you’re not going to leave me!” The dumb misery in Sydney’s face struck Linley with horror. He placed Kitty in her mother’s arms. The child’s piteous cry, “Oh don’t let her go! don’t let her go!” followed the governess as she suffered her martyrdom, and went out. Linley’s heart ached: he watched her until she was lost to view. “Gone!” he murmured to himself—“gone for ever!”

Mrs. Presty heard him, and answered him :—

“She’ll come back again!”

END OF VOL. I.



